

Savannah cats

Exotic felines with an addictive touch

The heart of many a cat lover skips a beat when seeing Savannah cats. Originating from a cross between a serval and a Siamese cat, the Savannahs are the tallest cat breed in the world, sporting a shoulder height of up to 45 centimetres. Characteristic for those exotic beauties are their large ears and the spotted coat resembling a predatory animal. The prices vary depending on the generation, on how true to the type the cat is and on the pattern of the fur. Starting from 1,000 Euro for a Savannah kitten, top specimens of the first generation can easily fetch prices of 10,000 Euro and more among dedicated cat lovers.



Humans have been fascinated by cats since the dawn of time. Worldwide there are some 40 recognised cat breeds. While pure-bred dogs are subdivided into their various tasks they perform for people (hunting, guard, protective, sled or com- panion dogs), cats are exclusively bred for their beauty. The Savannah cats originate from the United States. There, the first kit- tens came into this world in 1980 as the result of a cross between a serval and a Siamese. Even though it took a while, step- by-step the Savannah cat was established as an official breed. We have visited the Swiss Savannah cat breeder Corina Müller- Rohr (www.chsavannahs.com) in the Swiss town of Rudolfingen and learned some in- teresting facts about the breeding and keeping of those beautiful creatures.

Interview: Birgit Hügli-Herrmann

Ms Müller-Rohr, depending on the number of generations, Savannah cats have up to 75% Serval genes and therefore predator blood in them.

Let me just start with a few words about the breed 'Savannah' and some explanations about the difference of the number of genera- tions. The Savannah cat is an exotic and young cat breed that originated from a cross between an African Serval and a Siamese cat in the 1980s. The aim of the Savannah breed is to create a cat that closely resembles the beauti- ful African Serval in look combined with the uncomplicated character of a domestic cat. The Savannah cat is a tall, slender cat with long legs, long neck and a rather small, straight head with large ears featuring so called wild spots.

Are there any special regulations of laws that must be observed for keeping a Savannah cat?

All Foundation Savannahs have an F and a number associated with it to indicate how many generations it is away from its African Serval ancestor. An F1 cat has an African Serval as a father and would be the first generation removed from the African Serval. Therefore an F1 Savannah cat has about 50% up to 75% of Serval blood, depending on the mating. An F2 would be the second generation removed from the African Serval with a range of 25% to 37.5% of African Serval blood and so on.

A cat bred down from the African Serval, but it is at least 4 generations removed, is an SBT (Stud Book Tradition) Savannah cat. The SBT Savannah cat is a 'pure' Savannah that is guar- anteed to have only Savannahs as parents for at least 3 generations.

Since Savannah cats are a fairly new breed and some are considered Hybrid cats, the hybrid laws and regulations differ from country to country, even from area to area. In Switzerland the keeping of an F1 or an F2 Savannah cat needs a permission by the veterinary depart- ment, including an open-air and an indoor enclosure and an owner with an education in animal care. Savannah cats up to and including the fourth generation fall as Hybrid cats under the Convention on International Trade in End- agered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), which needs to be considered when border crossing.

Is there any particular knowledge required by the owner to keep a Savannah cat? From which generation are Savannah cats suitable for normal cat lovers?

Besides the special regulations of laws that must be considered, the owner has to be aware that the Savannah cat is a hybrid feline even in the lower generations. Savannah cats can potentially have smaller livers due to the Serval ancestry, which can increase the risk of side effects with certain medications.

As they have a certain amount of predator blood in them, they could react critically to ketamine, which is used for surgical procedures. Sa- vannah cats are also very sensitive to vaccination. A veterinarian must use different products that are specific to exotic or hybrid-bred felines. Being hybrids, F1 through F4 Savannah males are always sterile with very few exceptions. The females are reliably fertile from the first gen- eration.

I recommend informing the veterinarian about purchasing a hybrid fe- line so he can prepare and educate himself in case the Savannah cat needs any veterinarian support.

afraid of water and love to play with it. Their jumping ability is superior to the normal domestic cat. A Savannah cat expects to be a family member that is involved in every activity, rather than being just a usual house pet.

Are Savannah cats any different from 'normal' cat breeds when it comes to feeding? If so, what is a balanced diet for a Savannah cat? Savannah cats need to be fed a high-quality cat food in wet and dry form. The cats should get a high-nutrient, well-balanced food as well as cooked or raw chicken. The nutrition must be grain-free, no corn, as it is hard to digest for the cats and could cause intestinal problems.



What are the key characteristics of Savannah cats?
Despite their origin from a wild cat, Savannah cats are comparable in terms of attitude with other domestic cats. Savannah cats of the first and second generation are bigger and especially taller than domestic cats. Since they are closest to the African Serval, they are the ones that re- quire the most attention. They bond very strongly to their owners and need a lot of time. In F3 cats and all cats of later generations, the more domestic traits come out, the size decreases, but they retain their long legs, big ears and their wild appearance.

Savannah cats of all generations have very loving and outgoing person- alities. They are highly intelligent and learn quickly. They are very affec- tionate and follow their favourite person around like a dog throughout the house. Some even love to play fetch. Unlike other cats they are not

Are Savannah cats rather recommended for single people or are they family and kids-friendly? What about other pets?
There is no better family pet than a Savannah cat. A Savannah of lower generation is the perfect choice for a family with other pets and small children. As the higher generations are very time-consuming and re- quire special permits, I particularly recommend lower generations, as F3 or SBT Savannahs. They are more consistent in their type, personal- ity and size are better foreseeable and their temperament is predictable. These cats are very social and just want to have friends to play with. They love being around children and other pets. They can easily be kept in the house or in a spacious apartment. Most of them love to explore the outside in the safety of an enclosed area or on a leash.



How do I recognise a reputable Savannah cat breeder?

If you decide to take a pet as a new family member it is always important to find a repu- table breeder. For getting a Savannah cat it is even more important. As they are hybrid cats with special requirements, it is critical to have a breeder with a huge knowledge about the breed. The breeder should be willing to offer expert advice and be available in the future to discuss any problems any time. As basic re- quirements, the cattery must be clean and well-organized and the kittens have to be well-socialized with a health certificate and a pedigree of an acknowledged cat association.

But the most important thing is that you feel a huge portion of respect and love for the Sa- vannah breed and the cats. You must feel that the breeder is not selling you just something but your friend which will accompany you for the next 20 years.

Serval

The serval is an African wild cat approxi- mately the size of a lynx. The name serval most likely originates from the Portuguese word 'lobo-cerval' meaning lynx. The fur of the serval is tawny with black spots.

Photos: www.chsavannhs.com



