

What You Don't Know About...

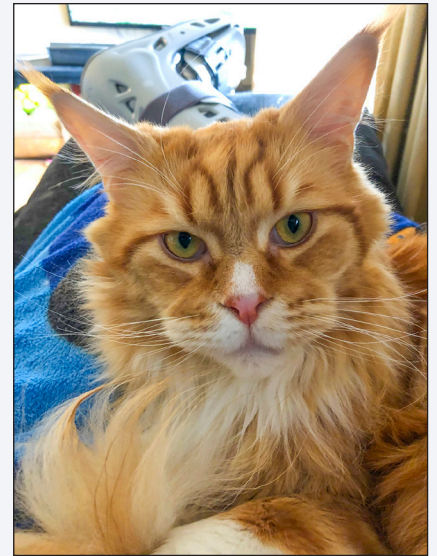
Maine Coon Cats

Behind the Gentle Giant

Candilee Jackson

Maine Coon Cats seem to WOW their audiences and human families by just being there; one look tells you this is no ORDINARY cat! They are clowns, they are interactive, they chirp like birds or baa like sheep, and are often referred to as the “Saint Bernards” of the cat world.

The official state cat of Maine, the Maine Coon Cat is a native American long-haired cat and is considered a National Treasure. (CFA) These gorgeous, fluffy goofballs have quirky personalities and fur everywhere. This author remembers speaking with exhibitor Wendy Brown as she was putting the final touches on her Maine Coon for the show ring: using a tiny toothed comb, she was carefully combing the tufts of fur between her cat's toes and stated, “Well, you pay for all this fur when you get an MC, so you have to comb out all of those little curls, not only between their legs, but between their toes!”



These beautiful felines come in practically all colors of the genetic rainbow, from solids to tabbies to calicoes, and everything in between. While all Maine Coons Cats have flowing, gorgeous fur which needs daily attention, it is the full, plumed tail and majestic ruff that give this cat a regal look. Maine Coon Cats can weigh-in anywhere from 10-15 pounds (females) to males as large as 30 pounds! As a newbie exhibitor some years back, this writer was amazed to see a huge male silver smoked Maine Coon Cat which was too big for the judge's cage and had to be “presented” to the judge. Following the exhibitor back to the benching area, the cat's owner had to lift the top of the wire enclosure to put the cat back in the show cage as it didn't fit through the door. Indeed, this was the “lord” of all Maine Coon Cats!!

Interesting Facts

With their lush, shaggy fur, Maine Coon Cats are definitely dressed for the snowy Maine winters: They also have large, tufted paws which act as “snowshoes. Before careful breeding limited the trait, many Maine

Coons had six toes, another genetic mutation that aided traction through the snow. Thick, plumed tails help keep these cats warm when curled up for a nap. Although their coat is almost water repellant, Maine Coon Cats LOVE water, and will not shy away from the bathtub or shower. Many owners tell tales of their Maine Coon Cats taking baths with them! (Fawcett)

For Harry Potter fans, Pebbles, a British Maine Coon Cat, had a featured role in each of the eight J K Rowling films. Discovered in a cattery in southwest England, Pebbles played the role of Mrs Norris, the pet of Hogwart's custodian Argus Filch, and was purrfect in walking across the set and stopping on command. (Fawcett)

Facebook users are enamored of Maine Coon Cats and they are always posting pictures of the largest ones they can find. “Stewie, an eight-year-old Mane Coon Cat,



held the Guinness World Record for the world's longest domestic cat before his death from cancer in 2013." (Fawcett) Stewie measured a whopping 48.5 inches from the tip of his tail to his nose.

Among the more unusual items in the Maine Coon Cat resume is "Little Nicky," who was the first pet animal to be cloned commercially." (Fawcett) Following his passing at age seventeen, his owner "saved his tissue in a gene bank. She paid \$50,000 to have the California-based Genetic Savings and Clone, Inc, transplant Little Nicky's DNA into an egg cell. A surrogate mother cat carried the embryo, and gave birth to a kitten similar in appearance and temperament to the owner's prized kitty." (Fawcett)

A Little History ...

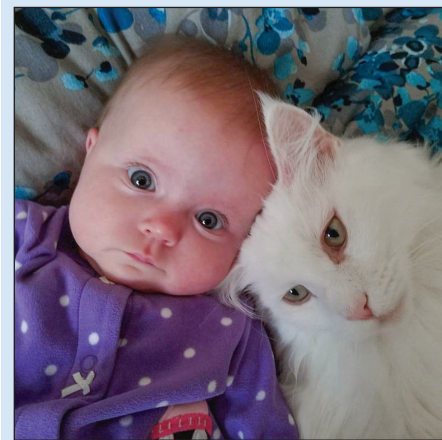
As one of the largest of domestic cats, the Maine Coon Cat is the oldest natural breed in North America, and "...is generally regarded as a native of the State of Maine." (MaineCoonsUSA) These felines "were recognized as a specific breed in 1861 with a twenty-two-pound male called Captain Jenks of the Horse Marines. Most breeders believe that the breed originated in matings between pre-existing short-haired domestic cats and overseas long-haired Angora types introduced by New England seamen, or perhaps long-haired cats brought to America by Vikings." (MaineCoonsUSA)

As America's first indigenous show cat, "a dozen of these down-east, working class heroes were listed in the program of a show held in Boston in January 1878. After years of local competitions and adoration, the Maine Coon Cat was chosen as Best Cat at the first major cat show ever held in

the United States. 'Cosey', a brown tabby female Maine Coon Cat, was awarded this distinction at the Madison Square Garden show held in NYC in May of 1895." The silver collar and medal awarded to Cosey is on display at the CFA Foundation Museum in Alliance, Ohio. (CFA Breeds)

A History of Myths and Legends

Shrouded in both myths and mists, the lovable Maine Coon cat has many stories regarding its origins, determined by whomever is spinning the tale. The most fantastic of the many stories include the genetically impossible mating of a domestic longhair with raccoons! This fanciful tale appeared when many of the New England Maine Coon Cats at the time were brown tabbies with distinctive rings on their tails. "The Maine Coon Cat also converses occasionally with an endearing trill or chirp, somewhat like the cry of a young raccoon." (CFA Breeds) The most romantic story tells of Marie Antoinette, Queen of France, and trusted ship captain, Samuel Clough, who had plotted to spirit the queen from the palace at Versailles, and smuggle her to the New World. Unfortunately, her capture foiled the escape, but not before Captain Clough had loaded his vessel with her personal belongings and six of her pet cats (which were Turkish Angoras). "Captain Clough had to make sail with all haste to escape repercussions for his part in the attempted rescue, and with him went the queen's possessions and the six long-haired cats still in his care. It is assumed that the queen's cats bred with the American cats and voila! the origin of the Maine Coon Cat." (CFA Breeds/Maine Coon Cat Nation)



Living with Maine Coon Cats

"What do you mean, I'm not allowed on the table?" laughed Susan Norbury, of Nu-coonrzn Cattery in Booneville, Missouri. "Maine Coons of all ages have problems with boundaries. Your personal space is also theirs!" When asked about "all that fur," Susan stated that they vacuum at least every other day, but her favorite thing about breeding is having kittens. Her babies are born in her bedroom, and stay there until they are about thirty days old. "We love having babies and each expected litter is like waiting for Christmas!"

John and Susan Rzyzcki of Broadview Heights, Ohio, own JR Coons Cattery, and claim, "The Maine Coons are living, breathing teddy bears and dearly love their kids." Susan continued, "They have no sense of their size, and you can find several of the big guys sitting on our laps. John is usually sitting under forty pounds of cat every time he sits down." Vacuuming is a major consideration when owning a long-haired





cat, especially one with so much hair! “We do have to vacuum every day,” Susan related, “...and we have had all the carpeting replaced by wood floors, and bought leather furniture instead of upholstered furniture for easier maintenance. Brushing them a few minutes every day helps to mitigate the fur balls blowing around the floor, and they seem to like the attention.”

Their first two Maine Coon Cats enjoyed taking neighborhood walk-about: “People would slow down driving to smile at the sight of us with these two big cats on a harness going for a stroll!” Susan remembered. “We have a large pond in the back yard with quite a few geese in it. The Coons would stalk and leap in the air to catch a full-grown goose. I have no idea what they thought they would do if they caught one. Probably expect me to cook it for them!” laughed Susan.

Teri Matzkin of SaraJen Cattery in Arlington, Virginia, was eager to share a recent email from a new pet owner who had adopted a brown tabby kitten named Mabel. “As to being mis-named, when you look at the attached picture it seems Mayhem may have been a more appropriate (name) for her. She routinely makes a game of her Maine Coon dry food, and we find it under rugs throughout the downstairs. Mabel has more personality than many people we know, and we thoroughly enjoy having her.” Teri was particularly tickled about the kitten having more personality than many people they knew: “That made me chortle!”

Located in Lincoln, Nebraska, Debbie Northrop Hopkins has owned Coonhusker Cattery since 1989. Her Maine Coon Cat, Peggy Sue, engages in what Debbie calls, “Pity Peggy.” “She puts her lead on the table and stares at us like it’s terrible that we are eating, and not sharing with her. She knows our rules prohibit her from being on the table, so this is her compromise,” stated Debbie.

A part of the CFA family since she was just a toddler, Bethany Colilla, Columbus, Ohio, owns Believers Cattery. “I fell in love with the Maine Coon Cat while my dad was working on the judging program. When it came time for me to start my own breeding

program, I had no doubt it would be that breed I had fallen in love with so many years ago. I’ve had several kitties with different personalities. I had one boy who liked to soak his feet in the water bowl, walk to the litter box containing clumping litter and then go back to soaking his feet in the water. He frequently turned his water bowl into a concrete mixer,” remembered Bethany with a smile.

Winnie Owens, a loving pet owner in Cato, New York, is sister to Alexis Mitchell who owns Syracoon Cattery who has bred Maine Coon Cats for over thirty years. “My experience with them has been nothing but wonderful. Sometimes the bigger the cats are, the bigger “baby” they become. They are very dog-like in that they will fetch toys and run to meet you at the door when you come home. They love to lay on a lap or your head. Some like to climb and “ride” on your neck and shoulders. They are very intrusive and will not be ignored. Head butting, rubbing and chirping are typical ways to get you to pay attention and pet them. If you want alone time, you have to close the door behind you!”

“Very inquisitive and persistent, a Maine Coon will try to fit into anything smaller than him/herself. They know where the toy box is and will get a toy and bring it to me to play. They love to give kisses and they are sensitive to human feelings. If you’re crying, they will quietly approach your lap, lay down and give a gentle nudge to your hand. Truly a marvelous breed of cat and I can’t imagine life without one,” stated Winnie.

Moonglade Cattery, owned by Nicole Turk, is located in Cleveland, Ohio. Nicole states, “Maine Coons absolutely want to keep an eye on everything, even sometimes going so far as to getting involved themselves. When people come to my house, there are Maine Coons on the counter by the door waiting to greet them. They reach out with their paws, chirp and trill, to get the visitor’s attention. Typically you don’t get past them without giving them attention. You’ll see them in the front window when you pull up and bam! — they’re at the door when you get there.” Going back to the vacuuming thing, Nicole is one of the lucky ones who owns a Roomba!





Editor's Note: Loud applause and "thank you" goes to Bethany Colilla, Breed Council Secretary, (Believers Cattery), Becky Galloway (Purrtingers Cattery), Debbi Northrop Hopkins (Coonhuskers Cattery), Teri Matzkin (SaraJen Maine Coon Cattery), Susan Norbury, (Nucoonrizzn Cattery), Winnie Owens, Jim and Susan Rzyzyczki (JR Maine Coon Cattery), Nicole Turk (Moonglade Cattery)

Citations:

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A Final Word

"**They. Get. Into. Everything.** I've had them in my painting. I've had them in my baking. I've had them in every box, or box-like object I've set on the floor. I once turned around to a Maine Coon in my fridge!" laughed Nicole Turk. And her take-away comment just about says it all: "How can you NOT love a cat that's bigger than some people's dogs? They play fetch, they snuggle, they kiss. What's not to love?"

Why Do Cats Like Boxes?

Cathy Scarbrough

Probably the best holiday for a cat is Christmas. Not only are there yummy smells and new ribbon to play with, but it is a time when a plethora of boxes appear. Cats don't care what comes IN the box, but only the box itself. We have a joke going that an Amazon delivery equates with a "free cat toy". Amazon may be the cat's second best friend.

According to one source, seeking out confined spaces like boxes goes back to instinct. In the wild, these spaces let cats successfully hide and hunt while seeking safety and security.

When introducing empty boxes to our domesticated cats, they first carefully investigate the object. They become familiar with every square inch of their domain, so when something new enters, they are curious. Once their curiosity is satisfied, instinct kicks in and they hop inside.

Although it would seem that cats would



only like boxes that provide complete concealment, they enjoy time spent in boxes of any size, and even in representations of boxes. There was an experiment showing cats plopping themselves inside a circle of tape on the floor. The theory is that cats still felt secure and enclosed, even though the "box" had no sides or even a bottom.

Cardboard boxes are the most popular because they are readily available. Some say that cardboard might effectively retain the cat's body heat, creating a cozy environment. Some also note that the security of a box could mimic the snuggly warmth a kitten feels while cuddling her mother and littermates. As a result it's possible that while box-sitting, a cat's body releases pleasure-inducing endorphins. In a Dutch study,

researchers gave one group of shelter cats empty boxes to use as retreats. Those cats adapted to their environment and appeared more relaxed than the control group.

Domesticated cats aren't the only ones who enjoy a nice box. Big cats are also fans, although their boxes are larger.

Cat trees with high-up boxes and elevated hide holes are feline favorites, while some cats prefer hideaways closer to the ground.

Keep safety in mind by removing all hazards like staples, tape, handles, string and loose pieces that could be choking hazards or if ingested cause damage to her digestive tract. Also, make sure your cat cannot get trapped inside a box. Cats don't like to feel trapped and their anxiety produces feelings of insecurity, the opposite feeling they seek from the box.

The internet is rife with hilarious pictures of cats cramming themselves into all sizes of boxes (and other objects), so it is a one-size fits all. So feel less guilty about making that next Amazon order and you AND your cat will both get a new present.