

ACBA: Breeds and Varieties

RAISING MARTEN CAVIES

by Juliet Barrera
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About a year ago, I had the good luck to get hold of a few Black & Tan cavies, the newly discovered color mutation, when I was vacationing in England. I am glad I took the opportunity when I could. I doubt if I could make such an import this year due to the Foot and Mouth problem over there. Even though cavies do not contract Foot and Mouth, animal shipments of all kinds have been restricted.

Since the import, I have worked with Tracy Iverson, who is presenting the Black & Tan in propagating these animals in the American breed. My Certificate of Development is for the Marten, which is the silver (cr) variant of Black & Tan. The Marten was originally (and presently in other parts of the world) referred to as the "Fox" cavy, which is a lovely name, but unfortunately is not consistent with the name of the similar looking rabbit breed accepted by ARBA. To help with the acceptance of Black & Tans and Martens, we have tried to keep the working standard and the terminology as close to the rabbit standard as possible.

It is always difficult when working with an unknown quantity to predict exactly what you are going to get from the breedings. Because the Tans are so new, we had very little background information on our original boars. My boar, *America*, was from a Marten (Fox) breeding to a Black. Because of this, I knew he was carrying the cr gene and also the non agouti gene. It was speculated that the Tan gene would be in the following dominance hierarchy with agouti, non agouti and solid: Agouti & Tan & Solid & Self, Agouti being the "most" dominant and Self being the "least". I found from my breedings that this was mostly true except in the relation between Tan and Solid.

As an experiment, I tried one of each breeding (with cr cr sows), to see what I would get. The first litter was from a Silver Solid American sow. She produced two large cr cr boar pups who exhibited a co-dominance of the Tan markings and the Solid markings, so in effect, they looked sort of like Silver Agoutis. Upon close inspection, it was clear that the ticking was like that of a Solid and not an Agouti. When I bred one boar back to Self sows, the offspring exhibited either the Tan markings, Solid

markings or Self markings. There were no "in between" offspring exhibiting both traits as their sire had (a relief!).

In another breeding, *America* was bred to a Silver Agouti sow. This breeding produced some strange results. The most surprising were the extra toes on the rear feet of some of the pups. I had not seen this in that line before or in any of my other non-import lines. It does not appear to be the infamous Px gene, which I am told is a dominant. I am unsure of the mechanism of this gene, because it has since popped up in litters from animals that did not exhibit the trait, but were offspring of this original boar and were out-bred to lines I could trace back several years from when I started my caviary.

The other surprising result was the red pup from this litter. If I had not seen this pup being born, I would have sworn he wandered in from another cage somehow! So this could only mean one thing: both parents are carrying the non extension gene. Other strange results I have had include an entire litter of Himalayan and the occasional partial extension (brindling). I have been very careful to cull out any individuals passing on or exhibiting the extra toes, so my program is going slower than it could with the Tans.

The Martens have provided me with no toe worries so far, but have been slow to propagate due to large numbers of Self pups instead of the desired Marten pups. Their litters have had the normal number of toes. Tracy graciously presented me with a weanling Marten boar, a Marten sow and cr cr Black sow just after Christmas. They have just reached an age where I can put them in breeding. The Marten sow was already bred and produced a nice Chocolate Marten boar and a cr cr Self Black sow. I will be placing her and her daughter with a Marten boar from the Solid to Self breeding I described earlier.

I am not naturally a good record keeper, even though I do keep my pedigrees straight. I just don't like paperwork, so it has been a struggle to force myself to make detailed entries about the litters and catalogue the results. This project has really shown me the importance of such things. I plan on having some Martens at the ARBA Convention, so come by and take a look at them.

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