A New Rat Variety
Down Under

By Cindy Sautchuk (NSWFRMC) and Yvette Hemberg (ANRA QLD)

At last Australia has a new mutation in the Fancy Rat, that is unseen in other parts of the world. This rat is characteristic of a thick line of colour on the tummy running from chin to breeches. This wonderful new breed was first discovered at the Rodent Ranch Stud In New South Wales, Australia, by Breeder and Club President, Cindy Sautchuk (pronounced Saw-chuck). Ukrainians don’t even ask!!!

We’ve chosen the name Down Under for this breed of rat, for a couple of reasons. Firstly because Australia is synonymous with the term Down Under, and because the primary characteristic mark of this breed is “Down Under”neath the rat. At first we thought about calling them double hooded rats, but after a few breedings with these it became apparent that the carrying mark was the tummy marking and not necessarily the back hood. As now we also have spotted type rats on the back but with the same unchanged tummy stripe. So this type of rat would be called a Down Under Spotted.

From this line of breeding it seems possible to breed a Down Under capped, Down Under Bareback, Down Under Hooded, Down Under Spotted, Down Under Dappled and Down Under Variegated. We are still working on isolating the particular desired markings on the back, and then specifically breeding for this only. However in all of this variation the Tummy stripe still remains unchanged and solid throughout.

The first Down Under Pattern was observed on a hairless rat, but didn’t become apparent until he was 8-10 weeks old. But due to the fact that the hairless strain of rats in Australia have many lethals, him being a hairless he died at 16wks. He had two furred parents carrying hairless. His grandfather was a hairless and his grandmother was fawn.

We did the same mating again and in the next litter got Enigma (rat pictured) the first furred type of this breed. He was the only Down Under in the litter. Cindy quotes, “I prayed and I prayed every night, please grow fur” And at 2 weeks her prayers were answered and she noticed he had fur. Also in the litter were Agouti berks, silvered black berks, and hoodeds. 12 in the litter altogether. 7 hairless and 5 furred. All hairless died around the 4 month mark.

So far when enigma is bred to most types of regular rat, hooded, irish, cardigan, berkshire, bareback. He produces between 30 & 80% DU babies, so about an average of 50%. Only on one occasion when he was bred to a self blue(mink) were there no Down Under babies in the litter. A pair have been kept from this litter, and are currently in for breeding now, to see if they will produce any Down Under babies.

Hairless Rats in Australia

The hairless strain here have a lot of sickness and ill health, despite every effort being made to prevent and/or treat this. It usually begins with the eyes clouding over. They go from being black eyed rats to a white opaque looking eye, the same thing happens with the red eyed rats. There were others who developed a red coloured fleshy coating appear on the eye. This red eye condition is not a common one, most of them get the white eye. Rats could still close their eyes. Cindy has only had one with the red eye thing. Some would get it as early as 4 days after they open their eyes.

The longest living hairless was one that lived just past 6 months of age. This hairless gene does carry as hairless babies have been bred from 2 carriers (with one hairless parent). But so far all the resulting babies also die from unexplainable health problems, always eye probs too. For these reasons hairless rats are not really bred here now.

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A Day in the Life of
( The First “Down Under” Rat )

Enigma’s favourite pastime is “Producing little Enigmas”. But be assured he has read the etiquette book, and generally treats his ladyfriends well. He’s the eternal milkman, just goes from rathouse to rathouse, servicing the neighbourhood, is a real ladies man. He started breeding at around 14 weeks of age. After a couple of breedings, he went back to live with his 2 brothers and 2 other friends for about 3 weeks, and then back to the business. He has lived with young males on and off, and been friendly to them, but basically lives with girls. He’s a real garbage guts, eats everything, not fussy at all, easy to feed, and he’s a very friendly little rat indeed.

So far Enigma has thrown a lot of good barebacks, and one almost capped rat. Enigma has been bred back to his capped daughter, but so far no more capped. But we hope to be able to get this breed from this line.

There are a lot of DU rats with dappling and spotting on their sides, some of these also have spotted or dappled back hoods, a couple so much so that they almost look like dalmation rats only with the solid head, a bit like the UK variegated rats.

First Reactions

A couple of informed people who knew they were looking at something unusual were very interested, and wanted to know when they could have one. But the general public sort of went “Oh that’s nice, or mmmmm a rat that’s nice. Didn’t realize the value of the gem they were holding.

There have been many more than just one major breakthrough with this new breed. Firstly is the presence of headspots on some of the babies. This up until now has not been seen anywhere in Australia, not even so much as one white hair where a spot would be. From these we’re hoping to breed blaze rats and the like. Secondly is the first manx rat in Australia, which ironically happens to be a female, (a*Grunt* from Cindy), so we are as yet unsure of weather we will breed her or not. The same mating has been repeated twice more, but so far no more manx.

Enigma was this close to Fame and Fortune: A friend of Cindy’s is an animal trainer. Her agency rang her with a job for phillips that required a black and white rat. That’s when Cindy supplied her with Pebbles(a petshop black hooded) and Enigma. Well this is where enigma and pebbles first mated. His onscreen lover. Pebbles got the job however, appearing on billboards around Australia. Just imagine if Enigma had landed the role, we may all have seen him a lot sooner.

What a perfect way to enter the year 2000, with so many prospects for new varieties, it all very exciting. We’ll keep you all posted on any new developments, and Trust that everyone in the Fancy is just as excited as we are about our new friends “Down Under”.

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