

ACBA: Breeds and Varieties

CHOCOLATES...GETTING TO KNOW THEM

By Chris Roach
JACBA Fall 2001

The Chocolate variety of cavy is a truly beautiful one and is recognized in all breeds and groups of cavies. Our Standard of Perfection refers to Chocolate as "the color of bittersweet chocolate having dark eyes with a ruby cast, ears and feet to match."

Much of my reference here is aimed towards the self Chocolate variety in the American breed for that is what I have raised for a great many years. Pertaining to the long haired breeds, Chocolates rarely achieve the desired depth of color. This applies to many varieties as in some strains- the longer the coat the more the color tends to fade. Also there is less emphasis placed on color in long haired breeds and with much more importance on the coat quality. Little importance is placed on color.

When you have a baby Chocolate born out of non-Chocolate parents, it is imperative that you check this baby over well, not only at birth, but again in a few weeks. Watch it, evaluate it and double check it to make certain you are correct in the variety you assume it is. You need to make certain that you are not mistaking this said baby Chocolate for a Seal, Sable or Sepia, none of which are true Chocolates.

All of the aforementioned are varieties or descriptions of varieties pertaining to rabbits. One breed of rabbit that best describes our Chocolate cavies is the Chocolate Havana. Our Standards states that the Havana should be "a very dark chocolate brown- so dark as to be the color of bittersweet chocolate."

When referring to Seal which is, at maturity, almost black, it's shaded slightly with Sepia and is found in both the Rex and Lop breeds of rabbit.

Sable is even more shaded. The head, back and flanks are a dark shade of Sepia and they gradually shade to a lighter or medium shade. Not only is there a Sable breed of rabbit but there are many varieties of rabbit that consist of the Sable shading. None of these are true Chocolates.

The color Seal that I am referring to in cavies is often the result of non-tipped Silver Agouti or Solid Silver being a base color and are often passed off as good Chocolates. These Seals are born as light as beige or as dark as chocolate, having very dark if not black

ears and feet even at birth. After the Seals molt their baby coats they get progressively darker and end up looking like a Black with a slight brownish cast to the under coat. They have dark eyes with a ruby cast and always- black ears and feet.

Many of the Seals have been mistakenly shown as Chocolates or Blacks and the Sable as Chocolates. Neither of these are accepted varieties in cavies and therefore are not showable. They are not true Chocolates and should never be implied as such! When it is stated that either "there is no such thing as a bittersweet chocolate" or the dark Chocolates are referred to as "those so-called bittersweets," I believe these are not correct assumptions for I have raised and shown true bittersweet Chocolate Americans for a vast number of years. I feel many are confusing the Seal or Sable with Chocolate.

How can you tell that you have a true Chocolate?

One unique characteristic of Chocolate is the texture. It has possibly one of the softest coats of any American cavy. Absolutely wonderful to feel! True Chocolates have a rosy/orange hue to their eye rims, nostrils, ears, lips, genitals and to a lesser degree, footpads.

Babies are born quite dark, but never black- and these areas become more apparent as they get bigger. This is especially true of the boars' genitalia, which have this hue quite pronounced at an early age and therefore very obvious. It is important to note that black ears and feet on a Chocolate is now a disqualification as stated in our Standard.

There are many things to consider when buying or breeding Chocolates, which of course applies to all breeds where Chocolate makes up all or part of the variety. There are a number of modifiers in the makeup that could govern the final results.

Some strains have the grizzle factor which produce a vast number of stray white hairs that are usually molted out and leave good color. Silver is a lot like grizzle, but is not molted and leaves the cavy looking like a roan.

Then there is the large C gene that makes "dingy" where the cavy has so much grizzling or fading that

the entire undercoat looks white and this does not molt out! I would not recommend keeping or using any Chocolate with these traits, especially if they are pronounced.

Occasionally you get Chocolates with stray red hairs or even very small patches of red. Care must be taken to weed these out as you don't want to propagate foreign color. I have had the odd baby that has both red and white whiskers. I don't keep these either.

Chocolates are quite versatile and can be used on a number of varieties such as Broken Color, Dalmatian, Dutch, Roan, Dilute Agouti or Solid Dilute where the base color is chocolate, not seal (check the ear and foot pad color).

Also, when Tans and Martins are accepted, Chocolates can be incorporated into these varieties to produce Chocolate Tans and Chocolate Martins.

I do not recommend incorporating any of the offspring from other varieties into the Chocolates for the results may be unfavorable. Try to keep your Chocolates as pure as possible!

It is said that Red, Red-Eyed-Orange, even Cream can be used with Chocolates. And some insist on using Blacks to improve type, which will result on a black overlay with black ears and feet- not desirable!

Remember, our aim is to produce dark bittersweet Chocolates without black ears and feet. In order to produce such a lovely variety, selective breeding is a must. Consistency is our goal and understanding what a true Chocolate really looks like is imperative. Seal, Sable, Milk Chocolate or those with a multitude

of varieties in the background are only going to hinder your desired outcome. Read the pedigrees on those you are considering and use this to determine whether said cavy is worth incorporating.

No matter the few pitfalls (and what variety doesn't have those?), I find Chocolates delightful, consistently hardy, great breeders and one of the most beautiful varieties in our fancy- well worth consideration!

Try some and see for yourself!

Chocolate Cavies

By Chris Roach

Chocolate is versatility abound,
In all Groups and Breeds is found.
Rich dark Chocolate- bittersweet,
Matching ears, matching feet.
Eyes dark, with ruby cast seen,
Coat soft, short and clean.
Black ears and feet disqualify,
Shown with such won't get by.
Lighter brown on eye rims, lips and nose,
Feet and genitals, this pigment shows.
Beautiful in coat and color,
Is unique, like no other!

Except as specified below, no part of this publication may be reproduced in any form or by any means, including electronically, or transmitted by any means without permission in writing from the American Cavy Breeders Association (ACBA). Copying: Single copies of individual articles may be made for private use or research providing copies bear the ACBA copyright notice. Authorization does not extend to copies made or distributed for profit, commercial advantage, promotional purposes, to electronic storage or distribution, or to republication in any form. In all such cases, specific written permission from ACBA must be obtained. Permission for Other Use: Permission is granted for brief quotes with the customary acknowledgment of the source. To reprint a figure, table or other excerpt requires the consent of the ACBA. For permission contact: Lenore Gergen (ACBA Secretary), 16540 Hogan Avenue, Hastings, MN 55033. Opinions of individual authors are their own and do not necessarily reflect those of the ACBA, its board or officers.