

The GCCF says Health and Welfare Come First

The Governing Council of the Cat Fancy considers the health and welfare of cats to be of the highest priority. The cat fancy was founded in 1871 by Harrison Weir with the explicit aim of improving the place of the cat in society and encouraging people to treat them with more esteem and better care. This remains an overriding principle that guides the way in which the modern cat fancy operates. Health and welfare are embedded in every aspect of the cat fancy and it is everyone's responsibility to contribute to it.

Cause for Concern

The GCCF is concerned about cruel or neglectful breeding practices undertaken by unregistered and unregulated breeders outside of the GCCF's aegis.

The GCCF is strongly against breeding from unregistered cats, or breeding from cats registered on the non-active register.

No kittens will be registered from cats on the non-active register as the breeders of these cats have not granted permission for their use in breeding. This might be because they were sold as pets or because they are in some way unsuitable for breeding.



The GCCF is extremely concerned about the deliberate breeding of unregistered kittens with pedigree parents or breed crosses by unregistered, unregulated breeders unwilling to obtain active-registered cats, carry out required health checks or DNA tests, have kittens vaccinated and keep them for the recommended 13 weeks, seeking financial gain at the expense of good breeding practices.

The GCCF is extremely concerned about breeding of non-approved crosses and only supports the breeding of cats as part of an approved breeding programme. Breeds should only be crossed as part of an approved outcrossing programme and non-approved cross breeding has no benefit for any breed and can yield unpredictable results.

The GCCF is against any neglectful breeding practices where female cats are allowed to become pregnant by free-roaming males which may pass diseases such as FeLV and FIV to their mates and offspring, breeding where owners of the female are not equipped to properly socialise and care for kittens produced and ensure that they receive a full course of vaccinations before going to new homes. The welfare of these cats is often compromised by overbreeding, with no checks on the frequency of litters.

The GCCF is concerned by unregulated breeding of closely related cats, for example when owners obtain sibling pairs and do not neuter them, or when isolated free-breeding cat colonies become increasingly inbred.

The GCCF is against the breeding of any breed or variety of cats whose physical structure could affect its welfare, including those listed above, and those with extreme body types resulting in the development of extreme characteristics detrimental to the health and welfare of the animals. The GCCF is concerned about the unregulated breeding of such cats with no checks on conformation.

The GCCF recommends that all cats, both pedigree and non-pedigree, should be neutered unless they are registered on the active register and used in an approved breeding programme with appropriate health guards in place and the intention of preserving or improving a recognised breed.

The GCCF has always taken very seriously its responsibility to support only the breeding of healthy cats. Various developments occurred during the early 1990s which gave rise to considerable concern and resulted in decisions being taken by the GCCF. Much earlier than this the GCCF had already produced a list of defects in cats which were considered damaging to a cat's health and welfare; this defects list is a part of the GCCF Standard of Points for judges, and cats showing any of the defects listed should not be awarded certificates. More recently, various breeds of cat have been developed which are considered by the GCCF to be unacceptable.

In 1991, shortly after a series of television programmes had shown various breeds including the Munchkin, the GCCF stated that it would strongly discourage anyone from importing such a cat and that there was no intention of recognising this, or any other new breed, which was based on abnormal structure or development. In March 1995, the GCCF Veterinary Sub-committee and the Executive Committee supported a statement made by the British Small Animals Veterinary Association which stated that the BSAVA were concerned that the breeding of animals for extreme anatomical features could have serious health and welfare implications. The Executive Committee agreed that it would join with the BSAVA in strongly urging that the fashion for the extreme should not be allowed to give rise to health problems in cats. The 2008 BBC Documentary Pedigree Dogs Exposed led to further scrutiny of recognised cat breeds in order to take pre-emptive action and prevent cat breeds from being developed in directions that would put them at risk of some of the issues experienced by certain dog breeds where extreme type or genetic disease have compromised welfare. This led to the instigation of detailed breeding policies for each breed.

The Animal Welfare Act 2006 states that all owners have a responsibility to provide adequate care for their cats. All domestic cats have needs which must be met and the Act summarises these under the following headings;

- The need for a suitable environment
- The need for a suitable diet
- The need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns
- The need to be housed with, or apart from, other animals
- The need to be protected from pain, suffering and disease

The GCCF is pleased that the increasing availability of genetic tests for hereditary diseases makes it possible for breeders to eliminate such diseases from their breeding lines. Where tests are available, the GCCF encourages the incorporation of their use into the registration policies for affected breeds. Many registration policies include requirements for screening that have eliminated diseases from breeds, preventing potential suffering in many kittens.

How do the different parts of the cat fancy work to protect health and welfare?

Role of the Governing Council

- The GCCF has a strategic role in protecting feline health and welfare and is a member of the Cat Group working in partnership with major Welfare organisations including ICC, RSPCA, PDSA, Cats Protection, The Blue Cross, Battersea Dogs & Cats Home, Wood Green and BSAVA.
- The GCCF is a member of the World Cat Congress and attends annual international meetings to share good practice.

- The GCCF Board oversees the running of the company including setting targets relating to health and welfare.
- The GCCF has a code of ethics which ensures that all breeders and exhibitors make a commitment to cat welfare.
- The GCCF business office is run in such a way as to include measures to protect cat welfare, for example computer systems flag up when dates of birth for litters are too close together indicating that a queen might have been overbred. The system also prevents the active registration of any kittens from matings between first degree relatives, protecting against the potential health implications, and matings including cats where DNA screening is a requirement.

Role of the Investigations, disciplinary and appeals committees

- A robust disciplinary system means that any GCCF breeder or exhibitor whose actions compromise the welfare of any cats can be censured.

Role of the Cat Clubs

- The GCCF has at least one club catering for every breed and numerous area clubs covering different parts of the UK, providing an extensive support network to the general public, pet owners, show exhibitors and breeders.
- Each club has a Welfare Coordinator providing welfare support, cat rescue and rehoming, creating a large network across the country. They are responsible for rescuing and rehoming large numbers of cats, both pedigree and non-pedigree, making a valuable and significant contribution to the welfare of cats in need.
- Club membership encourages correct breeding practices and adherence to the requirements and recommendations for the protection of health and welfare set out by the breed advisory committees in breeding and registration policies.

- Clubs provide expert advice about matching the correct breed of cat to the correct home and any specialist or breed-specific care requirements in order to maximise the welfare of the cat and ensure stable homes.
- Clubs use newsletters events shows to promote welfare good ownership.
- Many cat clubs collaborate in genetic research and help to raise money for it, contributing to the development of DNA tests and treatments that can eliminate diseases.

Role of the Breed Advisory Committees

- Breed Advisory Committees (BACs) are made up of representatives from all the clubs catering to a breed. They are a point of call for any breed-related health or welfare issues.
- BACs agree the standard of points for their breeds and monitor the standard of judging at cat shows, ensuring that type which could impact on a cat's welfare is penalised and that wording is interpreted correctly.
- BACs agree breeding policies which provide guidance about how to breed for health and good conformation.
- BACs agree registration policies which impose requirements, where appropriate, for DNA and other health screening to avoid preventable health and welfare issues.
- BACs agree outcross options to maintain healthy gene pools and avoid health and welfare issues associated with insufficient genetic diversity.
- BACs run regular seminars to educate owners, breeders and judges on elements of the breed, including breeding and showing.

Role of the Genetics Committee

- The Genetics Committee exists to advise the GCCF on all matters relating to breed recognition, registration on the GCCF register, breeding policies, and the overall genetic health of the cat.
- The committee provides scrutiny to any application for recognition of a new breed to ensure that it is healthy with no welfare issues.
- The committee reviews and advises on existing breeds and approves any changes to individual breeding or registration policies.
- The committee produces key strategic documents such as the GCCF General breeding policy, variants policy, outcrossing policy to ensure that best practice is in place to protect health and welfare.

Role of the Veterinary Committee

- The Veterinary Committee exists to advise the GCCF on all veterinary matters, including diseases, genetic health, other health and welfare issues and veterinary management of cat shows.
- The committee agrees the detailed list of veterinary defects which could impact on the welfare of a cat, including congenital deformities and issues of conformation, which are applied at cat shows.
- The committee oversees the veterinary inspections for all cats arriving at cat shows, to ensure that only healthy cats are granted entry and that no cat is present in a show hall which could pose a health risk to other cats.

Role of the Judges/Shows

- Cat shows help to promote the welfare of cats in several ways, demonstrating that cats are creatures to be appreciated and valued for their qualities and rewarding those whose cats are healthy, well cared for, correctly fed, well groomed, well socialised and in good condition.

- Cats entered in cat shows must be vaccinated, free of external parasites, well groomed and in good condition, establishing a baseline of good welfare for all show cats and promoting good ownership.
- Cats receive a veterinary assessment on arrival at shows to ensure that only healthy cats are granted entry.
- Excellent examples are rewarded and gain titles, promoting cats with the best conformation and health, while those with poor conformation or veterinary defects are penalised.
- GCCF standards ensure that extreme conformation which could impact on a cat's welfare is not rewarded at shows.
- The Youth Exhibitor Scheme (YES) teaches children about good cat care.
- Showing of cats which are not comfortable with the show environment is discouraged. Kitten classes allow cats to get used to show halls. Pedigree cats selectively bred for temperament often enjoy shows more and are less nervous in the show environment (but many random-bred cats also enjoy being shown).
- Shows promote the care of non-pedigree cats through household pet section and encourage people to see their value.
- Shows promote and preserve a variety of different breeds with unique qualities, ensuring a range of different kinds of cats suitable for different homes and owners.

Role of the Breeders

- The vast majority of GCCF registered breeders bring kittens into the world in the correct manner, with appropriate health and/or DNA screening for parents prior to mating, and kittens socialised, vaccinated, insured and registered prior to sale and not separated from their mothers before 13 weeks of age. This gives a high welfare standard and sets a standard for how things should be done.

- Breeders selectively breed for temperament so that cats are better bonded with owners and less prone to nervous behavioural problems which could result in rehoming
- The GCCF Breeder Scheme allows dedicated, caring and responsible breeders who aim for the highest standards and best practice in feline welfare to sign up to an enhanced Code of Ethics

GCCF Policy on Breed Recognition and Breed Scrutiny

The GCCF takes a stance against the use of random mutations altering the naturally occurring physical morphology or body structure of a cat in any way that could impair its welfare. It strongly discourages anyone from owning or breeding such cats.

Robust breed recognition processes which include scrutiny by genetics and veterinary committees to ensure that the proposed genetic basis of the breed or proposed breeding programme does not have any health or welfare issues

Prior to the recognition of any breed by the GCCF, robust scrutiny is carried out to ensure that no health or welfare concerns are in place that would impact on the breed. Only healthy breeds with an expectation of a good quality of welfare in a domestic setting can be granted recognition. Any potential health or welfare concern is a barrier to recognition.

All recognised breeds are regularly reviewed by Breed Advisory Committees and the Genetics Committee to ensure that good health and welfare are preserved and that no issues develop which could give reason for concern. Should any signs of hereditary disease be observed in breeding lines steps must be taken to address and hopefully eliminate these. Where relevant genetic tests become available appropriate recommendations or requirements should be introduced. Breed standards are monitored to ensure that breeds which have been selectively bred for more pronounced features or body type do not become extreme enough to cause concerns for health or welfare. Genetic diversity of breeds is also monitored and appropriate outcrossing encouraged to prevent potential health issues which could be caused if average inbreeding coefficients within a breed rise to unacceptable levels.

Further Information on Specific Breeds or Varieties

White Cats

Randomly bred white cats are at higher risk of deafness, while the GCCF has a series of measures in place to reduce the risk of deafness to a minimum. Breeding cats are required to have hearing tests to ensure that no deaf cats are used for breeding and policies are in place to prevent matings from taking place which could have a higher risk for producing deaf kittens.

Brachycephalic Cats

Persians and Exotic Shorthairs have a shorter head type than other breeds and this shortening of the head is referred to as brachycephaly. This is not a defect and cats with moderately brachycephalic head type and well balanced features should not experience any health problems as a result of their head type. However, selective breeding for extreme brachycephaly can result in a range of anatomical deformities and the Persian breeding policies states that cats displaying these features should not be used for breeding. Show cats are penalised for reduced nostril aperture, exaggerated depression of the nasal bridge, abnormal bites or abnormal position of the nose leather. Persians and Exotic Shorthairs with more moderate type can and do win awards at GCCF shows.

Manx Cats

The Manx cat was one of the original breeds of cat recognised in the early days of the cat fancy and it is now a very rare breed in the UK. While it has been suggested by past studies that Manx may have a higher incidence of certain health problems associated with the Manx gene, further research is required to clarify this as new evidence from DNA research casts doubt on some previously held views. The GCCF Manx breeding policy has been updated with a thorough revision and certain breeding protocols are in place to prevent matings which might be problematic. A veterinary health check is now required for all breeding Manx. It is now thought that some health problems seen in the past in the Manx may have been related to breeding for extreme type, with Manx selectively bred for very short backs. The GCCF standard of points has now been changed so that a short back is no longer desirable in order to mitigate against this. Further study is required to ensure the best measures are in place to protect the health and welfare of this ancient native breed.

Ragdoll Cats

Many comments had been made about Ragdoll cats and so the decision to recognise them was not taken until very careful investigations had taken place. Reports were obtained from a leading veterinary college to confirm that the central nervous system of these cats is perfectly normal, that they are not in any way different from other cats and that they are no more or less likely to be floppy when relaxed than any other cat. It is also questionable whether they have the very high pain threshold that has been suggested. The Ragdoll was first introduced in the United States where the breed was speedily patented. The only way in which such a patent could be obtained was by the claim that the cat was unlike other cats; this claim has since been discredited both in the United States and the United Kingdom.

Hybrid Breeds

The GCCF will not approve any breeding programme including the production of interspecies wild cat hybrids because of the welfare considerations for these hybrids, which often do not have temperaments suitable for domestic settings, may be fearful or stressed if kept in such settings and may have very specialist care requirements. Wild cat hybrids are the first, second and third generations from an initial cross between a domestic cat and a species of wild cat. After the fourth generation of mating back to domestic cats the proportion of wild species blood is reduced to a small level (6%) and the progeny can be considered to be domestic cats.

The GCCF does recognise the Bengal cat, which was originally developed from crosses between domestic cats and the Asian Leopard Cat, however, under no circumstances will the GCCF register or recognise any early generation hybrids and only fully domestic Bengals are acceptable. The Bengal was first introduced to the UK in 1990 and was granted preliminary recognition by the GCCF in June 1997 and, with each progression towards Championship status, restrictions were placed on the production and registration of early generation cats.

It is GCCF policy to not support any other breed whose breeding programme includes the production of wild cat hybrids, with their special care needs and welfare considerations.

Hair Deficient Breeds

The GCCF does recognise the Sphynx, which has a form of hypotrichosis (reduced hair growth) resulting in a very short, fine coat, like peach fuzz, giving the impression of hairlessness. The Sphynx gene has no other effects and Sphynx are healthy domestic cats which can live happily in a domestic setting. Like all cats, they need grooming, however Sphynx do have rather different grooming requirements to other cats. They have to have the sebaceous oils washed from their skin because there is no hair to dissipate the oils and allow them to be removed naturally. They need to be protected from cold and although Sphynx with outdoor access will go out in cold weather, they should never be excluded from indoor access. They may also need some protection from strong sunlight because of the risk of sunburn and skin cancer (although there is no evidence to suggest that Sphynx are more prone to skin cancer).

In other species some other genes causing hairlessness can have additional deleterious effects on other structures in the skin, including teeth and mammary glands. Therefore, the GCCF has no intention to register any other hair deficient breeds.

The following breeds of cat are not recognised by the GCCF:

Scottish Fold: There is no intention to recognise this breed because the gene which produces the folded ears also causes skeletal abnormalities, producing stiffness of the limbs and tail which increases with age. This is especially true when two fold-eared cats are bred together but it has been shown that cats with only one gene for folded ears also suffer from abnormal stiffness. Under these circumstances it has never been recognised and we strongly advise members of the public not to try to acquire cats of this breed.

Other Folded or Curled Ear Varieties: No recognition has been given to any other folded or curled ear variety as it is possible that such varieties suffer from similar defects to the Scottish Fold.

Polydactyl Cats: No recognition will be granted to any polydactyl breed or any polydactyl variety of any existing breed. This structural mutation confers no welfare benefit on a cat and in some cases additional toes can be prone to damage and claws growing on additional toes may not be worn down and could cause damage to the cat.

Cats with foreshortened limbs: There is no intention to recognise Munchkins or any other dwarf breed.