



WINN FELINE FOUNDATION

For the Health and Well-being of All Cats

637 Wyckoff Ave., Suite 336, Wyckoff, NJ 07481 • www.winnfelinefoundation.org
Toll Free 888-9MEOWIN (888-963-6946) • Local Phone 201-275-0624 • Fax 877-933-0939

Ronan's Big Heart

When I accepted the challenge in 1996 to breed for a show quality lilac point Himalayan, little did I know the roadblocks I would come across in my quest. Oh, I was educated about FIP (feline infectious peritonitis) and warned about ringworm. If you breed long enough, bring in new breeding cats, or simply attend a cat show, you will eventually meet the task of addressing these issues in your cattery. But it all seemed worthwhile to achieve a goal that few had attempted, and even fewer attained.

I have been breeding since 1996, and throughout the years I never heard a Persian cat breeder speak of heart disease. This includes Himalayan and Exotic breeders since they are part of the Persian breed. It wasn't that heart disease didn't exist in Persian cats. It was that no one was revealing its existence. It could have been ignorance, but not for the experienced breeder. It's the proverbial Ostrich Syndrome.

Many breeders have experienced the heartache of losing a cat or kitten to sudden death or congestive heart failure. But when it came to doing something about it, they simply felt powerless, since there was no way to genetically predict which kitten or cat would succumb to this disease. In years past we had to do test breeding to determine whether or not a breeding cat carried a particular trait genetically, including PKD, which could only be detected at that time by kidney ultrasound. With the introduction of DNA testing panels and the marker for PKD in Persian cats discovered, breeders have come to rely on genetic tests for their breeding program. They can now prevent the genetic passing of PKD and other diseases so that offspring are no longer at risk of inheriting those diseases.

Even without a genetic test for heart disease in Persians, some cats who were positive for HCM could have been detected by having cardiac ultrasounds, showing evidence of HCM once the disease manifested cardiac changes. Unfortunately, some cats will have the gene mutation(s), without showing signs of HCM until a very mature age, and will have already passed it to offspring. These are exceptions to the rule because most cats will show some cardiac changes suggestive of HCM by two years of age. These ultrasounds have been available for years, but few breeders, if any, were scanning their cats. Even now, with awareness of HCM, few breeders are getting ultrasounds to test for HCM. The most common excuse I have heard was cost. To me this was not an acceptable excuse for breeders claiming to breed for health. The solution for this is to pass that cost on to the clients buying offspring.

There was no way to predict which cat would inherit the gene for HCM (hypertrophic cardiomyopathy). So no one talked about it. After all, HCM had the full attention of Maine Coon and Ragdoll breeders. It was "their" disease.

How prevalent is HCM in Persians? There are various estimates of the current penetration of the disease in this breed. My veterinarian, who has dealt with many breeders over her thirty plus years of practice, says she is seeing HCM by cardiac ultrasound at a rate of about 40% in Persians cats. FORTY PER CENT of Persians, at least within the realm of her practice, may carry the potential for having this disease; and they have a 50% possibility of passing a potential mutation to offspring from a breeding cat, even if they inherited the gene from only one parent. That sounds very similar to the characteristics of PKD, doesn't it?

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Here is my challenge: I am making every possible effort, contact, and plea for Persian breeders to pull their heads out of the sand and step up to the plate, the contribution plate that is. I have made arrangements with Winn Feline Foundation to set up a fund that is designated strictly for this research: Persian HCM Research Fund.

I also want to encourage breeders to become a part of a new and exciting study involving positive HCM cats using DNA Genomic Sequencing. This state of the art method of studying DNA was initiated in December, 2014 by Jeanne O'Donnell, and is being conducted by Kathryn M. Meurs, DVM, PhD at NC State Veterinary Genetics Laboratory. Dr. Meurs was involved with the HCM studies in Maine Coons and Ragdolls. Contacting her was the suggestion of Winn Feline Foundation's President, Dr. Glenn Olah. I am so grateful for Dr. Olah's help in advancing this cause.

I discussed with Dr. Meurs the current research and the amount of time involved in waiting for advancements with that buccal swab DNA study at Texas A&M. She was very interested in our project and immediately set up the parameters for the Persian Genomic Sequencing study. This type of research had been cost prohibitive. The DNA of three of Ronan's 1st generation offspring (all Himalayans) are already a part of this study. And Persian breeders who have positive HCM cats are finally asking to become involved. This is ground breaking technology in studying DNA with a potential ability to check for possible mutations in Persians and other breeds by comparing DNA markers breed to breed. It will yield literally thousands of bits of genetic information. Exotic breeders may also be asked to have their cats' DNA included in this study, since American Shorthairs are part of the foundation of that breed division, which is known to have HCM within that breed.

This is my plea: I am asking that all Persian breeders (including Himalayans and Exotics), as well as owners of these purebred cats, to make a contribution to the Persian HCM Research Fund. The researchers will submit a grant proposal to request funding for their research from Winn Feline Foundation. A grant will only be offered once sufficient funding has been allocated to the fund. We need a minimum of \$15,000 and only have until 2018 to raise the necessary funding. If we don't reach that goal the funds will be transferred to the general fund. So time is of the essence.

Make the donation now. The longer we wait; more and more Persian cats and kittens will die from this disease. If researchers can find one or more genetic mutations for HCM in Persian cats via one or both research studies, the next step will be to create a test for the mutation/s. If you want to begin submitting DNA for one or both studies (buccal swabs for HCM and non HCM cats to Texas A&M) (blood samples and cardiac ultrasound results for NC State), please call me or contact me through my web site www.donegalhimalayans.com or my Facebook web site (Donegal Cattery – Himalayans, Persians), and I will put you in contact with the appropriate researcher. Studies cost money, especially Genomic Sequencing, so we need to raise adequate funding for research to continue. Breeders, it is far more important than producing that "perfect show cat." If we don't pursue this effort, the Persian breed will continue to fall prey to this genetic disease, jeopardizing breeders' ability to claim that they are breeding for health. This will likely be the most important endeavor breeders can make to the future of the Persian breed.

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If you wish to talk with me about this disease, I can be reached at 910-270-4787. I can call anywhere in the USA and Canada for free, so just leave me your name and phone number and the best time to call on my answering machine. Thanks for your support.

Jeanne O'Donnell (Donegal Cattery, <https://www.facebook.com/donegalcattery?ref=hl>)

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