

## Historical References to Polydactyly in MCBFA

(This article was published in the Spring 1999 edition of The Scratch Sheet, The Official Publication of the Maine Coon Breeders & Fanciers Association) Mitten-paws, Double paws, Snow-paws, or the more technical polydactyl, whatever you call them, they have been around from the beginning of the Maine Coon Cat. It is a little known fact that many of our original Maine Coons were Polydactyls. In the book written by Marilis Hornidge (That Yankee Cat The Maine Coon, 1981) she states that the Polydactyl Maine Coons "were so dear to the hearts of the original group of enthusiasts who drew up the MCBFA standard, that a special classification with its own standard was set up for them." **Original Standard** This standard according to the 1970 Spring issue of the Scratch Sheet noted that "Our MCBFA Polydactyl Standard has been voted in by our membership, and the wording is as follows: The Maine Coon Polydactyl Cat should conform to the Standard of the Maine Coon Cat, with the exception that multiple toes are allowed on either fore or hind paws, or both. According to Dr. Rod Ljostad (MCBFA vice President), in order for the Maine Coon to be accepted for show status this standard was set aside in favor of the "five toes in front and four in back" standard we see today. Dr Ljostad (Maine Coon International, Issue 15:3/98) stated this was not done as a reflection on the soundness of the polydactyl but rather it was an economic and political decision." This is why today we can use Polydactyl Maine Coons in breeding programs but we are unable to show them. The various cat associations only wanted a single standard per breed so the poly standard was not proposed to these associations. Dr Ljostad was under the impression that within a few years the standard would have been changed to include the polys. This was almost 30 years ago. However, MCBFA still has two official standards. Below is a sketch of a Polydactyl Maine Coon Cat's Foot printed in the Scratch Sheet in January, 1969. Below is a photograph of a Polydactyl Maine Coon foot. Both the sketch and the photograph are examples of Polydactyl Maine Coon Cats with an extra dewclaw. One or two extra dewclaws is the usually form.

**Make Haste Slowly** There is more evidence of the work on the standard took a long time. In a letter from Rodney A. Ljostad, then Vice President of MCBFA to Mrs. Benner of Pine Needle Club that was date June 6, 1970 . In this letter Dr. Ljostad said "Apparently our group and yours started at about the same time. Most of our breeder members first became fond of the Maine Coon Cat while visiting the State of Maine . It seemed unfair to us that this beautiful cat was not eligible for championship competition at most of the cat shows in the country. We formed this organization to promote the Maine Coon Cat so that hopefully, one day it will be recognized by all. We soon discovered that our task was not simple. We decided at an early date to concentrate on the usual Maine Coon and postpone efforts on such variants as polydactyls, semi coons, and cobby tails until such time as some progress had been made. Actually we need all the help we can get. Would the members of Pine Needle be willing to go over our standard with a red pencil and suggest changes? We would agree that it should be revised.?" This standard is still being revised even today. **Showing In Household Pets** How quickly we forget that for years the Maine Coon was shown in Household Pet Rings because they were unable to be accepted for Championship Status. This quote seems to support the fact that in CFA the Maine Coons were not accepted for show status but in

another association the Maine Coon Cat had been accepted. In Sept of 1970, there was a letter from Rodney A Ljostad, Vice President of MCBFA to Mrs. Roes. It stated " I have been asked to express our appreciation for being able to show Maine Coon Cats at the White Plains Show last weekend. There were 26 Maine Coon Cats. The Westminster Show Committee was kind enough to arrange a special section for us under the Household Pet class. Most of us thought it important to have these cats seen by CFA member, thought frankly, our membership was divided on this, and some did go to Exton , Pennsylvania the same week-end where 13 more Maine Coon Cats were shown in championship competition. **Pollyanna** Dr Ljostad had a Polydactyl Maine Coon female named Sundar Pollyanna of Jo Stad. She was a tortoiseshell and white. In Sept of 1973 there is a letter to Mrs. Gould from Dr Ljostad which stated "we have a six toed kitten in our house too. You are right that they are not accepted at cat shows yet. We knew that many Maine Coon Cats were polydactyl and did not want this trait to get entirely lost from the breed. Then we heard that some of the breeders who had these cats were no longer able to breed them. So my wife and I decided we had better get one and keep this trait going in the breed." Although the percentage of polydactyl Maine Coon Cats is smaller today than thirty years ago there are still Breeders carrying on the lines. Although no one can predict the future these historical references show a continuing interest in the trait.