

The silver fawn that won the silver cup at the New York Show

GUINEA PIGS, RABBITS AND FANCY MICE

A BREEDING HOBBY THAT HAS SPRUNG UP IN THREE YEARS IN THIS COUNTRY—THE FUN OF PRODUCING A CAVY WORTH \$15

By CLAUDE H. MILLER

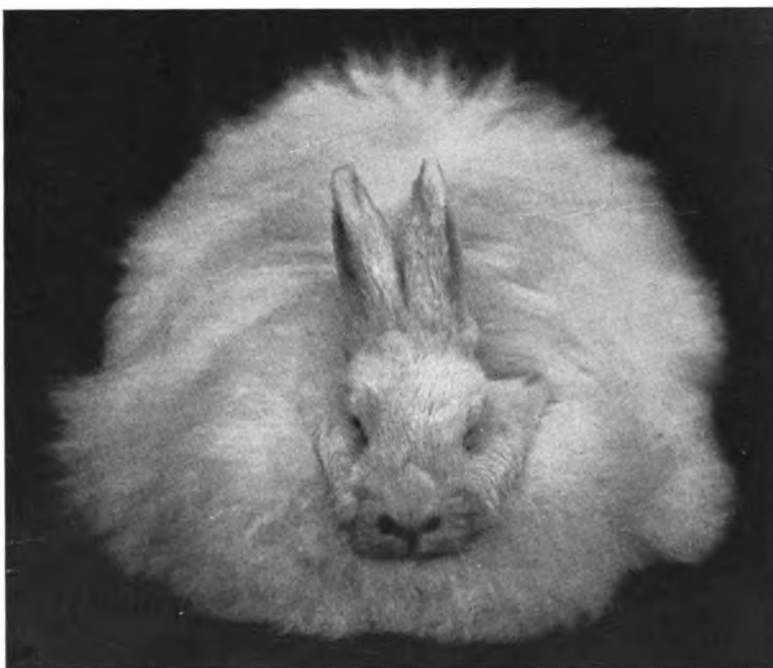
Photographs by JESSIE TARBOX BEALS and others

THERE are a thousand members in the Mouse Club in Europe, and yet most people regard mice, as well as guinea pigs, rabbits, and the other small deer, more or less as children's pets and hardly worth the notice of grown-up people. Once a year, at the poultry show, we may exhibit a momentary curiosity in the cages of queer-looking animals—the catalogue calls them cavy—with nervous, shifty movements and such funny coats, all long and silky, like a skye-terrier, or short and bristly, perhaps, like a scrubbing-brush; but how many of us realize what care and thought and worry have been expended in breeding these peculiar markings or that shade of red and brown? How many of us have tasted that rare joy that comes to the fancier when his exhibit wins over his competitor? These animals are not the result of chance by any means. They have been developed only by the most painstaking work of some man who has had a definite ideal in mind and has tried to produce it; not an ideal of his own fancy, but some-

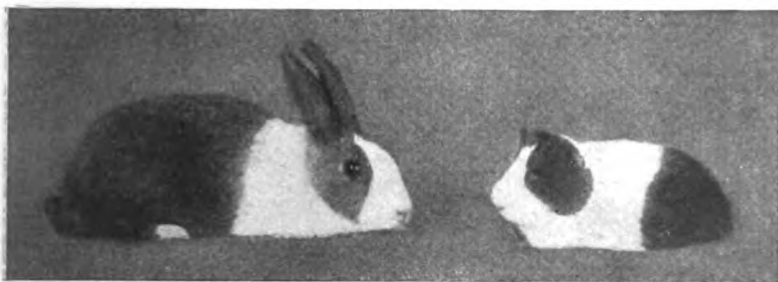
thing that is definitely set as a standard to breed to, by a committee appointed for the purpose.

There is a real aristocracy among these little furred creatures. The exhibition cavy or rabbit or mouse that has a splash of black or brown just a little nearer the ideal location than its neighbor in the cage next door, or whose hair is just a shade longer or silkier, wins the "blue ribbon," and immediately its owner becomes the object of envy of the less fortunate owners whose exhibits did not meet with the judge's favor.

A fancier of animals is a queer sort of being, anyway; rational enough in most things, but when you talk to him about his hobby—pigeons or dogs or what not—he becomes wild-eyed and terrible, absolutely intolerant of anyone whose opinions differ from his own. He is not in the game for money or even fame, because surely to own a winning guinea pig, unlike the advent of a new Kipling poem, is hardly of national interest. No, the underlying motive seems to be the satisfaction that comes from producing



White Angora rabbit. The ideal of excellence in this breed is the possession of the longest, silkiest hair

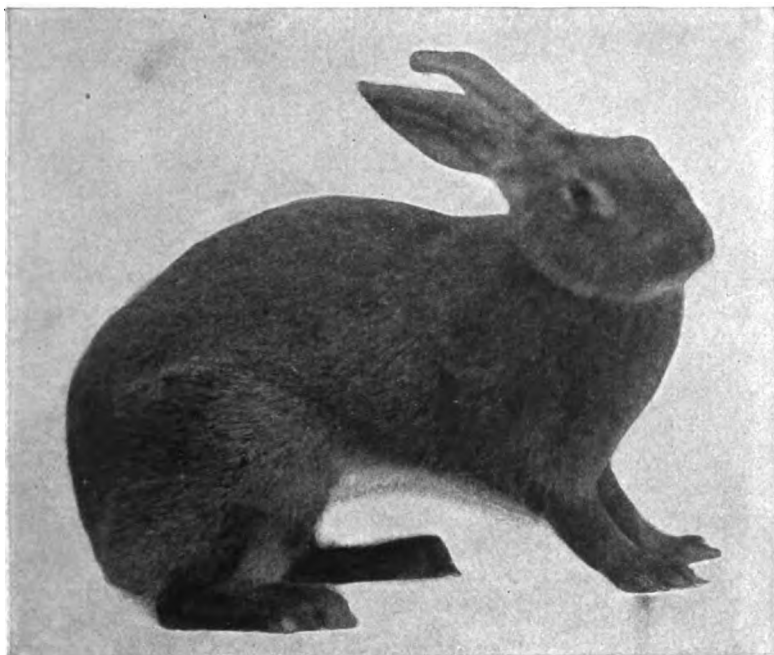


Dutch marked rabbit and cavy, showing the same characteristic markings as in Dutch belted cattle, and Hampshire, or Dutch belted hogs

something just a little better than the other man and proving it on the exhibition bench.

The real motive, of course, in breeding these small animals is to produce new types or perfect specimens of established types. The rapidity with which generation follows generation enables the breeder to obtain results more quickly than in the case of the larger animals such as dogs or cattle, and besides, the breeding of small animals is a hobby that is not limited by a small purse. A few guinea pigs or rabbits are not expensive.

Recently there has been a great revival in popularity of small fancy fur animals. College professors, professional men and laymen have become interested by first buying a pair "just to amuse the children," perhaps, but the compelling interest of the little animals with their bright eyes and interesting ways soon removes them from the province of mere pets and they become a real hobby.



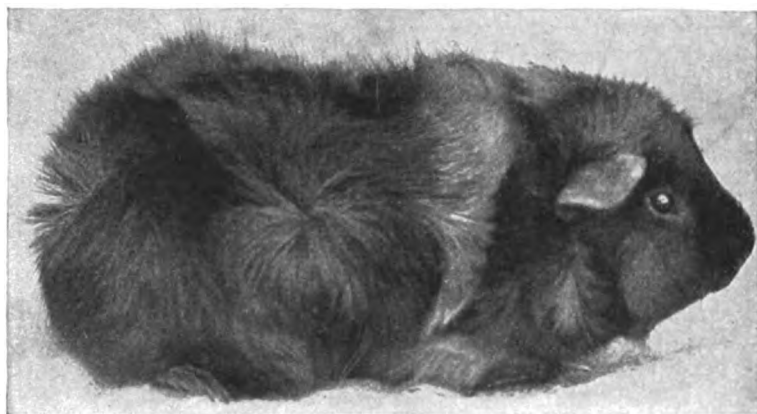
A Belgian hare. A breed that has suffered from the overzealousness of its friends. Not a commercial success, but a fine rabbit

We often wonder why our neighbor spends all his spare time fooling with some chickens or pigeons or rats or goldfish, perhaps, when he might be doing as we do, and be out playing golf or fishing. Well, the answer is that he enjoys it or he would n't be doing it. He surely is n't doing it for profit, because, in spite of the fabulous prices that we hear are occasionally paid for some prize-winners, the average fancier is not making his living by his hobby, but rather in spite of it.

The general method adopted by fanciers of all animals is to agree to a certain ideal and then breed toward that ideal. This is done by crosses and selection. In order to systematize the breeding of small animals, an organization was formed three years ago of various clubs whose members had been interested in fancy breeding but who lacked a comprehensive organization. It is called the American Fur Fanciers'

Association and consists of breeders of rabbits, cavies, and mice. They have adopted a Standard, by-laws and rules for registration to guide the members in working for definite results.

There are ten distinct types or classes of rabbits recognized in the Standard: Belgians, Flemish Giants, Dutch Marked, English, Himalayan, Silvers, Tans, Polish, Lops, and Angoras. These classes are further subdivided by color. There are three general classes of cavies: Peruvians, Abyssinians and Smooths, with a special class for Peruvian Silkies or Pseudo-Angoras. Each of these is divided into the broken-color and self-color classes, which are again sub-



An Abyssinian cavy. Prize winners in this type have a maximum of rosettes and the coarsest quality of hair

divided into colors, such as tortoise, black and white, cream, red, etc. Mice and rats are similarly classified by colors. The most popular mice are the blacks, albinos, Dutch marked, tans, etc.

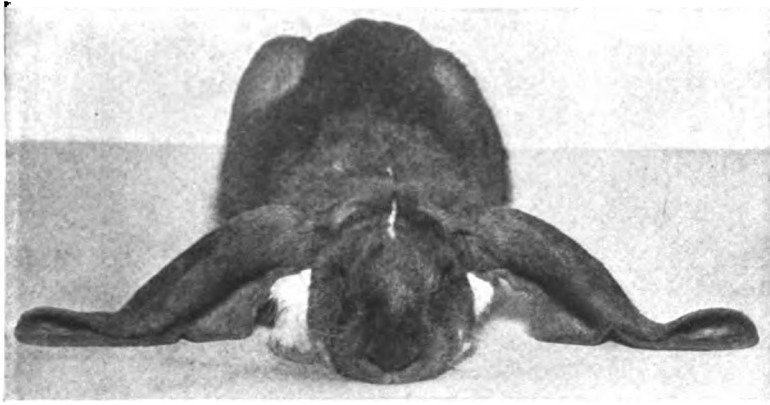
Every year the members exhibit in competition with each other, and judges carefully weigh the merits of each exhibit, as in the case of horses or cattle, and award the ribbons and the silver cups in accordance with this judgment. Certain arbitrary values are given to various characteristics based on a perfect score value of 100. In some kinds, for instance, length of fur may count 20, its density 15, color 10, general condition of the specimen 5, and so on, the judge striving to score the specimen with an impartial eye.

Abyssinian cavies, for instance, are covered with close rosettes of coarse hair, and with them the ideal to be striven for is a maximum number of rosettes. The coarser the hair the better. Consequently they can be judged by feeling. When you wish to stroke an Abyssinian cavy it must be from the tail up — the way we used to tease the cat — because their hair lies that way.

With Peruvian cavies, on the other hand, the finest, silkiest hair possible is perfection, and breeders exercise the greatest care to keep it in good condition. It is a common practice to put it up in curl papers and to separate various



White Peruvian cavy. An animated pen-wiper that has an abnormal growth of hair, which is put up in curl-papers before a show



A Madagascar or lop-ear rabbit. One of the most spectacular of the rabbit breed

exhibition specimens to prevent them from chewing it. The short, coarse hair of the Abyssinians is deciduous, but it is claimed by some breeders that the extremely long hair on the back of the Peruvians has a perennial quality and is not shed during summer, but wears off.

There is more to these animals, however, than the mere fancy. There is a positive pleasure for young and old alike to have a living animal for a pet about the house. Cavies are especially desirable for children. They teach the child to be kind to helpless animals; their feeding and care teaches in an inductive way what responsibility means. While cavies are not remarkable for their intelligence they do learn to know their master's footsteps, to whistle at his approach and to distinguish him from strangers or even other members of the household.

Cavies are not objectionable in the house if their coops are cleaned regularly. It is very important to keep them dry, however, and unlike rabbits, Peruvian cavies are not able to stand cold weather. Cavies will eat almost anything and eat constantly; hay, clover, wheat, corn, carrots, turnips, various vegetables, and green food are all good. They are especially fond of bread and milk. The staple cereal food for rabbits is oats, whole or crushed; with cavies maize forms the foundation of the menu.

In breeding rabbits and cavies extensively, especially the former, there is bound to be a surplus stock to be disposed of, but at the present state of the fancy they can readily be sold to dealers. It is said that they can also be eaten, but who wants to eat a pet rabbit? A fancier said to me that he tried it once and felt as though he were eating one of the family. Cavies are also eaten, and nearly all cook



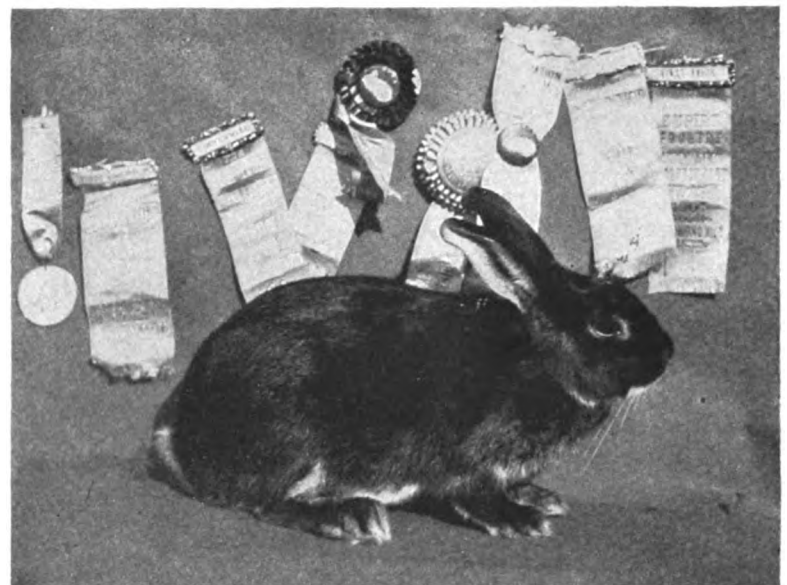
Rabbits make model pets for children, with whom they are always favorites, although they cannot stand rough treatment. Dogs are their traditional enemies. A pair of common white rabbits may be purchased for \$1

books in the Spanish American countries contain recipes for "cavy en casserole," "cavy aux fines herbes," "cavy with capsicums," etc.

Of course there is a very large demand for cavies for scientific and experimental work in laboratories and hospitals, but that demand is largely met by farms where cavies are raised for this specific purpose, and in any case most of us would prefer not to cater to this demand.

The breeders of fancy rabbits are especially anxious to be differentiated from the exploiters of the disastrous Belgian craze of a few years ago. While Belgian hares are still bred and exhibited and bought and sold for large prices, it is simply from the fancier's standpoint.

In passing, it might be well to say that the collapse of the Belgian hare craze is typical of the fate of many of the highly specialized fads that city people think there is money in. As long as there was a demand for breeding-stock, Belgian hare breeding appeared to be highly profitable. When this want became satisfied, however, and the buyers



A prize-winning black-and-tan. To obtain these ribbons is the ideal for which all rabbit fanciers strive. It proves that your rabbits are a little nearer perfection than those of your competitors

became sellers, the business collapsed simply because the public refused to eat rabbit.

Three years ago there was practically no market for these animals; now \$25 is considered a fair price for the larger and more popular rabbits, and guinea pigs that are so fortunate as to have prize-winning progenitors bring from \$2.50 to \$15, while highly-bred mice are worth \$5 or \$6. As much as \$50 for a rabbit and \$10 for a mouse have been paid by enthusiasts. A pair of young standard-bred rabbits or guinea pigs can ordinarily be bought for as low as \$2 to \$5, however. They make good pets and sometimes develop into show specimens.

Guinea pigs or cavies are interesting not only for what they are but for what they are not. Their name is a misnomer, since they are neither pigs nor natives of Guinea, their origin probably being South America. In spite of a popular humorous book on the subject, and a still more popular impression, guinea pigs are not very prolific, usually breeding but twice or three times a year, with from one to three in a litter.

The plastic qualities and wide range of colors of cavies, rabbits and mice have made them a favorite with breeders, and many interesting combinations have been made. Most people that start in to raise them simply for the fun of the thing without attempting to compete for prizes or to breed true to color afterward become the most enthusiastic fanciers.