

tainted by both his and Ben's actions and commands. So, he seeks to destroy Ben and the other rats in a fit of rage and guilt. The Ego seeks to destroy the actions it allowed the Id to take, in a sense. I also think it's horribly sad that he does betray all the generally neutral rat population by setting them to kill in the first place then punishing them for their success at carrying out his baser impulses - essentially sacrificing them to appease his own guilt. But it also gives a redemptive edge to the final scene (as well as the foreshadowing element suggesting more action in future.) And I think it speaks highly of rats - their capacity for forgiveness when you screw up. Sorry, minored in English at a college steeped in lots of theory, so I can't help myself sometimes. I'm also a big habitu  of the Seattle International Film Festival and an unabashed cinema nerd, so I just can't help myself!

Lynn and the Ruckus of Pompous Film Reviewing Rats

*Please note – this was an emailed critique, not a formal paper! I had asked Lynn to let me include this in our newsletter because she has some interesting ideas!

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION OF THE AUSTRALIAN DOWNUNDERS TO THE UNITED STATES

By Tracey York, 2003

During the latter part of 1999 I saw a photo of a rat that made me do a double take, look again, and then just go "WOW". Cindy Cairns from Rodent Ranch Rattery in Sydney, NSW, Australia, had bred Rodent Ranch Enigma, a rat quite unlike anything ever been seen before. This rat not only had a hood going down the back of its body, but a full-length tummy stripe as well!!!! A hooded both sides, and for a short while was known as the Double Hooded/Striped rat before a suitable official title could be found. Sometime later a fancier in the UK, Sue Brown from Pendragon upon seeing photos of Enigma made a witty comment about this rat from "downunder". As we are known in Australia as the land from "Down Under", and the rat had a stripe "downunder", Cindy thought this name was very appropriate so hence, the Downunders were officially named.

Where did they come from? Cindy had received a shipment of hairless rats that had come from a laboratory in Western Australia. Upon breeding these rats the first actual Downunder was born, a hairless buck. Once the buck reached breeding age, in one of the litters he sired the very first, fully furred Downunder, Enigma. Not much fuss was made of this event until Cindy took Enigma to a rat show in NSW. Even then people, whilst interested, didn't really get excited. I suppose the reluctance to pay a little more for something so unique was a factor, perhaps they didn't realise the uniqueness of this marking? When I and a fellow fancier from Qld saw Enigma we placed our order and eagerly waited in line to get a "Double Hooded/Striped".

My Downunders arrived December, 1999. A breeding pair and a spare (doe). This marking is dominant, you do not need two Downunder parents to replicate the marking. The potential for breaking up the hood and the spotting on these rats made me very excited at the possibilities and I set to work straight away trying to develop a Spotted Downunder. In honour of the Downunder name I expanded my original rattery, bRatpack, to incorporate a new rattery totally dedicated to DU's only. RatmanDU Rattery was born!!

I started breeding the Downunders and one of the planned matings was to breed Minstrel, my Downunder buck, to Bridie, my Mink Irish doe. When the babies are born from a DU litter the tummy colour does not come in straight away, the hood along the back does, then several days later the actually tummy stripe is visible on dark rats. It's quite exciting to wait to see how many DU's are in there. Checking the babies each day to see if we had any DU's from Minstrel X

Bridie I was disappointed, no, no stripe on the tummy, no hood on the back.....just some spotting from the front to rear legs on each side. Upon working out just what this could be we realised they were Berkshire Downunders!! Gee, this marking was amazing!

In early 2000 I had an approach by a lovely lady by the name of Pauline Van Berkel in Holland to export the DU's. We went ahead with the export and they arrived in the middle of 2000. After about 12 months it became apparent there were some problems in the DU line. Problems had appeared not only here in Australia, but also in the UK where they had been exported from Holland. There were temperament issues despite the fact I had outcrossed them to my long lived, well established lines a large majority of the DU's weren't very friendly, not aggressive, just aloof, distant and didn't like being handled. A very small amount also had eye problems, rats born with one eye, no eyes, or big eye/small eye. It wasn't until sometime much later in late 2002 I was informed that the original hairless lab lines that the DU's came from had been stopped because of unresolvable eye problems. In retrospect I wish now I had kept the DU line here a little longer before exporting them to monitor for any potential problems. In light of the fact that we hadn't seen any health issues in our rats over here it didn't enter my mind that the DU line could have any negative health/genetic issues. I'm a little wiser now!

As we had never been faced with a problem like this in Australia, we don't see many genetic problems at all, I became very disheartened and considered giving up breeding them. It had always been the main focus of my goals to breed healthy, happy rats with excellent temperaments. I decided to plough on cautiously continuing only the DU Berkshire and the DU spotted lines in an attempt to monitor them for any instability. It was during this time I was approached by several people overseas, especially from the US, to do another export. I declined, stating I was in the process of testing the stability of the lines and until I was satisfied that they were okay I would do no more exports.

As I was the originator of the breed I worked very carefully on developing the DU berkshire, seeing there was potential there for amazing spotting and dappling. The spotting standard that I wrote for the DU berkshire is for "as much dappling and spotting as possible from the front to rear leg on each side, 4 white socks and a white tail tip". I have developed them with spotting almost as high as their spine, the huge amount of dappling is exquisite. The latest achievement we have from this line is RatmanDU Cherub, a magnificent overmarked DU berkshire that looks dappled like a roan horse, or a roan guinea pig.

By the early part of 2002 I had monitored the line very carefully for nearly 18 months and saw no signs of problems and the good news was the temperament issue had been resolved! Connie Perez of San Francisco approached me to do an export to the US. After much chatting via emails I knew that Connie was the right person to do the shipment to. Not only does she hold the same values that I do in regard to the rats, she has extensive genetic knowledge that would enable her to work out our colour issues between countries.

We commenced arranging the shipment. I was determined that this time the shipment would be the very best we could manage in regards to colours and markings so there was a varied range of both going to the US. I also wanted for Connie to be able to run about 4 to 5 totally independent Aussie lines if she didn't wish to inbreed. The end result? 10 ratties were decided as the final number going.

I made suggestions for potential litters and Connie requested specific matings. Rats were put together to be mated but as we entered our Aussie winter they weren't interested in mating, it was too cold!!! 5 planned matings went in at the same time, hopefully 5 litters due at the same time and ready to fly at the same time. It almost worked! A couple of litters were born early but it was imperative that they all be born within the space of 1 month of each other so they were pretty much the same age. The price of the shipment was calculated by weight, so we wanted young ratties to go, certainly not adults, they weigh too much!

The shipment was originally planned to arrive in the US in September but due to the cold winter experienced it had to be put back, finally being ready to fly in December. I booked the flights for them to arrive on the US weekend, the departure date, December 13th, and a Friday to boot! Was this an omen? I started to feel very nervous, after months and months of planning it was coming to fruition, I was exhausted. Would they arrive safely? Would the flight stress them? Would Connie like them? I need not have worried, Connie had prepared so carefully that the Aussie rats had a special diet and housed separately right from the very start to ensure a smooth transition from country to country.

On a wet, rainy day they flew into San Francisco, my little Aussie sweeties going to their new American rat Mummy. It's amazing for me to think that my Aussie rats now reside in the US, in a place I would love to visit but haven't had the opportunity to yet. Connie and I are in constant contact and a few of the mysteries of whether our rats are genetically compatible are being answered finally.

Kindest Regards

Tracey York
bRatpack & RatmanDU Rattery
President/Judge - AusRFS Inc Qld
AusRFS Inc Qld abbreviated for Australian Rodent Fanciers Society Incorporated Queensland.

www.bigpond.net.au/theorks
and
www.ratmandu.com

The Down Under: a New Australian Mutation

By Sue Brown

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The challenge of breeding a perfectly marked rat has always been irresistible to some. Marked varieties - Hooded, Capped, Berkshire, Irish and Variegated - have always been popular among breeders, both for their striking patterns and the excitement that each litter may bring.

Now the rat world welcomes a variety of Marked from the land "Down Under" which represents an unique new challenge in rat breeding.

In the late 1990's, rat breeder Cindy Cairns of The Rodent Ranch rattery in Sydney, Australia obtained some rats from a laboratory carrying a variety of different genes including hairless, but Cindy soon discovered they were hiding something much more exciting. News of this broke on the internet in December 1999, when a Brisbane breeder, Yvette Hemberg, who had taken on some of these rats announced to the world the existence of the "Double Hooded" - normal hooded rats but which also had a "saddle" stripe on the belly.

Posted to the Ratgenetics mailing list was a full description, and photographs, of Rodent Ranch Enigma, a black "double hooded" buck. Looking like a normal mismarked black Hooded rat from the top view, underneath Enigma sported a wide unbroken black tummy stripe.

It soon became clear that Enigma was not a one-off genetic freak, as his pattern reliably reproduced itself, and many more double hoodeds were born in the ensuing months. The hairless gene was bred out of the line as it produced sickly hairless which died young, possibly due to the immune-compromised Rnu gene, and the Double Hoodeds were developed as the first home-

grown Australian rat variety. Because of the quirky belly pattern, and the Australian origin, the rats were dubbed "Down Unders" - "DU" for short.

Tracy York of the RatmanDU Rattery in Brisbane took on the variety and developed the Berkshire patterned Down Under. Logically, one might wonder how a rat can be a Berkshire AND possess the coloured belly stripe, but this is an intriguing combination. Imagine a normal Berkshire with a white belly running to the sides, and superimpose a central, wide coloured stripe. You now have a coloured rat with a thin white stripe running from its front legs to its hind feet. In reality, this most often appears as a chain of tiny dots and streaks, though one ideal might be to aim for a narrow, unbroken thread of white.

Down Under will also combine with Irish, although the coloured stripe hides most if not all of the Irish triangle. Breeders working with the variety discovered that rats which they thought were self-bred as Irish and passed on the DU pattern, indicating that they were in fact DU Irish.

In June 2000, rat breeders on both sides of the world held their breath when a consignment of Down Unders left Australia for the first time, bound for Holland. Pauline van Berkel, of Rattery Horlepiep took delivery of nine Australian rats who endured the long journey without mishap. Not all were Down Unders, a few were from an Australian line noted for its robust health and longevity, lifespans of up to four years not being unknown in the strain.

I contacted Pauline not long after the arrival of the Down Unders, as I had been following the progress of the variety and corresponding with Australian breeders for some time. A few months later, in November, I went over to Holland to meet Pauline and see her Down Unders for myself. I asked to be added to her long waiting list, and in the spring of 2001, was told that at last, a Down Under was available for me.

Horlepiep Bones, a black Berkshire Down Under, became the first male Down Under to step onto British soil, together with a Topaz Down Under hooded doe, Horlepiep Amice, imported by Estelle Sandford. Although owned by me, Bones went to stay with Lucie Mann at her rattery to spend a precautionary quarantine, and whilst there was introduced to two of Lucie's females, a Mink/Chocolate Hooded doe and an Agouti Capped doe, who became the mothers of the first Down Unders born in the UK. These kittens have now become of showing age and the first to be exhibited was shown at the LSCMRC show at Enfield in June 2001.

All Down Unders currently being bred go back directly to Engima, who was black Hooded DU, but along the way other colours have been produced in the Down Under pattern. Agouti Down Unders have the top pattern as normal Agouti, but the belly stripe is the same colour as a self Agouti's belly, i.e. silver grey. Topaz and Silver Fawn Down Unders are very difficult to determine as, like the Agouti, the belly stripe corresponds to that of a normal Topaz or Silver Fawn colour. In some lights it is possible to distinguish the pale silver or cream belly stripe on the rat's underside. The best colours for Down Unders are Black, Agouti, Mink and Cinnamon; Australia as yet has no Chocolate, Blue or Russian Blue colours, though late breaking news is that a blue resembling our standard Blue may have just been discovered in a Down Under line.

An interesting legacy of the Down Under is that the imports appear to be carrying colour genes unique to Australia. An intriguing new colour has been produced in the first few litters, born pale "blonde" and later darkening to a light café-au-lait or pale milk chocolate colour with dark red/ruby eyes. It seems to be dominant, as babies were produced in crosses with our own rats, and test matings are under way to discover if it may be a new allele of an existing colour. The colour known to Australians as Mink, although superficially similar to our own Mink, also behaves in a very different way and is born pale fawn which darkens to a bluey-brown, with black eyes. It may be possible to extract Australian Mink from the Down Unders we have, and make some interesting genetic comparisons.

Genetically, Down Under is a dominant pattern gene, over other H locus genes such as Hooded and Berkshire. This means that breeding a hooded Down Under to a hooded, for example, will produce some hooded and some Down Under offspring. This makes the gene very easy to work with, and avoids the need for close line-breeding in order to perpetuate the variety.

Australia has no Capped or Variegated varieties, so breeders here are keen to discover how the gene behaves with these H locus alleles. One of the first litters born was to a capped doe, and indications are that it will be possible to produce a Capped Down Under, a rat with a coloured head, but still with the Down Under belly stripe.

Other possibilities abound, including the idea that the Down Under could be used to produce Chinchillas and Huskies (Roans) without white belly markings. If the Down Under pattern combines with these varieties, the stripe on the underside could easily be encouraged to hide the white belly pattern, producing an all-over Chinchilla or Husky, though still with the white blaze or head spot and white feet. If this is possible, then a Striped Roan/Husky really would become striped, top and bottom! However, early indications are that this may not be feasible; Horlepiep Bones carried Husky genes from his Dutch-born mother and these were passed on as normal when he was bred to a Husky doe, producing normal Huskies without a trace of any Down Under pattern.

Another possibility, already being worked on by one UK breeder, is to develop a true Dalmatian rat. In this variety the Down Under stripe could be encouraged to break up into small spots and patches, producing a rat which is spotted all over, head to tail and top to bottom.

The Down Under is accepted for show by the Australian clubs, and the following standards are in use:

DOWNUNDER HOODED - Hood should be unbroken and straight, measuring 1 inch or slightly more wide the full length to the tail, tummy stripe should be the same width and unbroken. No side spotting.

BERKSHIRE - Solid body colour on top, tummy stripe should be full length, and running between front and rear legs on each side should be as much dappling/spotting as possible. Feet to be white to half their length and white tail tip.

SPOTTED - Back hood and tummy stripe to be as broken up as possible giving the effect of spotting all over the back and tummy, side spots desirable. Head spot and white chin stripe highly desirable.

HOODED/SPOTTED - Hood should be unbroken, straight and even, measuring an inch or more wide, tummy stripe to be the same, but with as many side spots as possible.

VARIEGATED - Hood should be as broken up as possible giving the impression of spotting, with lots of side spotting also. Head spot is highly desirable. Tummy stripe to be full length and unbroken measuring 1 inch or slightly more in width.

Whether you view the Down Under as an attractive novelty, or a great new challenge to breeders of marked rats, it is a striking pattern which certainly turns heads. My first sight of one at the rat show in Rotterdam last year made me do a double-take - it took a few seconds for my dim brain to register that the black hooded rat reaching up to the lid of its tank didn't have its head on the wrong way round... !!

Sue Brown, 2001
