



THE HISTORY OF FANCY MICE

In The Beginning

When humans ceased to be hunter gatherers and instead became farmers, their lives and those of mice became intimately connected. Humans learned to grow and store grain, and mice learned it was easier to feed off these stores than to fend for themselves. Thus began the relationship between humans and mice. While this relationship was of necessity not an amiable one, it was inevitable that someone would eventually catch and keep a mouse. This first "pet" mouse was most likely a normal wild colored Agouti; however, color mutations are rather common in mice. Unusually colored individuals occur with some frequency in the wild and often when these animals were discovered they were caught and kept as interesting oddities.

The First Reference

The first written reference to non wild-type mice was in the Chinese Lexicon *EhYah*. In 1100 B.C. it recorded a word for what we know as dominant spotting. Archaeologists have also found Egyptian bowls and other artifacts dating from this same period of time which contain pictures of colored mice.

The next written documentation of unusual mice was a reference to dancing (waltzing) mice in the annuals of the Han Dynasty. These mice were described as "yellow"; the record was made in about 80 B.C.

Between A.D. 307 and A.D. 1641 China had a considerable increase in the interest in colored mice. During this time there were over 30 documented cases of white mice being taken out of the wild. In 1654 it was even recorded that when one particular Chinese Buddhist priest traveled to Japan, he brought with him his

two pet mice (they were Black-Eyed Whites).

The First Fancy

It was during the 1700s that the mouse fancy really got its start. In Japan they were increasing in popularity not just as pets but as breeding animals, and many people were experimenting with producing new colors. In 1787 a booklet called *The Breeding Of Curious Varieties Of The Mouse* was written by Chobei Zenya, a Kyoto money exchanger. This booklet included a number of drawings, descriptions of several breeding programs, recipes for creating specific colors, and mention of a number of varieties. These included Albino, Black, Black-Eyed White, Champagne, Chocolate, Lilac, and Recessive Spotting.

The N.M.C. Is Born

In the early 1800s these colored mice began to find their way into Europe. Slowly they increased in number and popularity, particularly in the U.K. It was in 1877 that Walter Maxey, the father of the mouse fancy, acquired his first mice. In 1895 he helped to found the National Mouse Club in England. This was the beginning of the mouse fancy as we know it today. The National Mouse Club set standards for the different varieties, and held shows. Their first show was in 1895 in Lincoln, and was won by Miss Ursula Dickenson with a Dutch Even.

It was during this time that Mendel's theories on genetics were rediscovered by the scientific community. Fancy mice proved to be excellent models to use for further research. Being small, easy to house, inexpensive to maintain, and quick to reproduce they became favorites for other research as well. When scientists first became interested

in fancy mice they would often acquire new mutations from the early fanciers, and provide fanciers with unusual animals produced in their laboratories.

The National Mouse Club is still in existence today, and its members throughout the years have made major contributions to the fancy. Most of the colors we have today were standardized by these dedicated people. They also greatly improved the conformation of the mouse through the last 100 years by selecting the biggest and the best.

Mice In The U.S.

The history of domestic mice in the United States is not very clear. Most likely people did catch and keep wild mice as pets, and unusually colored ones probably were found. Unfortunately, there are no written records (that we are aware of) documenting this. Scientific laboratories are responsible for most of the fancy mice found in the U.S. Early pet care books dating from the 1920s suggest contacting a local laboratory or university to obtain a pet white mouse. If this was not successful they recommend asking a pet shop keeper to contact their animal supplier and see if they could provide one. Apparently many people who bred animals for pet shops also supplied them to laboratories.

The First U.S. Mouse Fancy

The mouse fancy is relatively young in the United States. The first U.S. mouse club came into existence in the 1950s. Set up much like the National Mouse Club in England, the American Mouse Club set standards and hosted shows. This club eventually died out; however, in 1978 the Mouse and Rat Breeders Association was formed. In 1983 the American Fancy Rat and

Mouse Association originated. There are now other clubs in the United States, and many more worldwide.

Mouse Popularity

Over the last 10 years there has been a large increase of interest in fancy mice as show animals and pets. In a large part we have the recent popularity of reptile keeping to thank for this as many people buy rodents to feed their reptiles, and end up discovering what wonderful pets mice make. Also, people have less time, money and space for animals, so are often turning to pocket pets as an ideal alternative. Mice today are more popular than they have ever been and we can look forward to this trend continuing into the future.



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If you would like additional information or have further questions, contact the Association.

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