

Sable History

The history of the Sable is the history of the Saanen, at least in the beginning. The ancestor of the domestic goat, the Persian Bezoar, was not white but dark gray with black markings. the white color is a mutation that appeared, apparently fairly often, since white goats are known from the very early times and in widely separated locations around the world. The Swiss, in particular, seemed to admire this white coat and deliberately bred goats with this coat color, since white was easy for the shepherd to spot on the high mountain sides. However, the white color is dominant; this means that any white goat may possess a color gene which is hidden and which can appear in the offspring when paired with a recessive color gene from the other parent. This means that, for all practical purposes, these recessive color genes cannot be bred out since they are hidden in the genome of the white animals. thus, wherever the white Saanen goes, around the world, hidden color genes (and the potential for producing colored offspring) goes with her.

Saanens were first imported into the U.S. beginning in 1904, with most imports occurring between 1904 and 1922. Many of these were obtained through the services of a French goat expert and government employee, M. Josef Crepin. M. Crepin did not like the Saanens, believing them to be the weakest and poorest of the Swiss breeds. He was very much concerned with albinism and believed that the continual breeding for the white coat would lead to the production of albinos. today, we know that this is not the case and white coats have nothing to do with albinism. Nevertheless, because of this, M. Crepin chose Saanens for export only if they were themselves colored or had a colored parent. Sable breeders everywhere owe much to M. Crepin - he was the major force in making sure that the color gene arrived in America!

M. Crepin contribution was not the only color infusion, however. At least two early importation's, the Stucker imports of 1905 and the Gallibarton-DuFresne imports of 1904, were controversial, to say the least. The Stucker import in particular was known to include several Schwartzenberg-Guggisberger animals, described by the government as "fawn or brownish-white, very large and long haired." The Gallibarton-SuFresne animals were smaller, of the Swiss type, but were known to produce many colored offspring as well as horned offspring. It should be noted here that the Swiss culled horned animals in an attempt to

produce an entirely pooled breed, so the production of horns, as well as color, was looked upon in the U.S. as a sign of impurity. However, M. Crepin felt about horns the same way he felt about color, so he made sure that the horned gene was present along with the colored gene in animals he chose for export. Nonetheless, many in this country felt that these imports were "tainted". After much discussion, AMGRA settled the issue by passing in 1914 a rule which stated that all goats which were imported from Europe before the end of 1914 were to be regarded as "purebred," regardless of documentation. Thus the Stucker and the Gallibarton-DuFewanw imports, as well as numerous others, were given equal status with the animals from Switzerland and added their color genes to the melting pot.

A few more imports were made during the years 1922 to 1939, but these had little or no impact on the breed as a whole. However, in the early 1930's, a decision was made that had an impact on not only the Saanens/Sables, but on goat breeders as a whole. This was the decision concerning the so-called "10th cross" rule. In essence, this rule stated that any goat of unknown breeding, when mated with a purebred buck and the offspring "bred up" over 10 generations, could be entered into the registry as a purebred. This rule produced a cataclysm which split AMGRA irrevocably. The "purists" who were unable to accept this rule left the organization to form what is now the American Goat Society, while those in favor of the rule became The American Dairy Goat Association. Undoubtedly, addition color genes were added to the Saanen gene pool via this rule.

The first Saanen breed club was formed in 1937. This breed club was disbanded after a few years and another breed club, which exists today as the Saanen Breeders Association, was formed. This breed association had a serious impact on the Sable breeders which persists to the present. Up until that time, colored Saanens were registered as purebreds right along with the white ones, and early AMGRA and ADGA books show many animals which were not white. However, the Saanen Breeders Association adopted a resolution that, in the future, only white Saanens would be acceptable for registry, with colored Saanens being excluded from the registry altogether. There was no place at all for these animals until 1954, when the tenth-cross rule was abandoned and the current American-Grade-Experimental system was developed, allowing colored Saanens to be registered as Experimental. Also about this time it was decided to relegate the Sable status unconditionally to 50% AS whether of purebred or American lineage, which effectively obstructed the building up of the Sable as a breed.

After WW2, another event took place which had an impact on Saanens, including Sables. By this time, imports from Europe had been banned by the USDA for many years. Imports from Canada were permitted, however. In the late 1940's the USDA passed a rule that said in essence, that any goat that resided in Canada for two or more years was considered to be Canadian born. Since Canada still permitted imports from England, this allowed English goats to be brought to Canada, and after two years, brought into the United States. About 50 goats were brought into the U.S. in this way, many of them Saanens. They were very *different* Saanens, however, and appeared to be a different breed. Before WW2, England imported a number of Saanens from the Netherlands. The Dutch bred these animals differently than the Swiss, and instead of the lithe, agile, smaller Saanen of the Alps, these Dutch Saanens were larger, sturdier and more productive than their Swiss counterparts. They also had quite long hair, a characteristic which has led some to speculate that at least some of the animals used in producing them were not Saanens but the Northern Swiss white breed, called Appenzells, a breed also suspect in the Stucker imports. Another white breed, this time from Scotland and stemming from the Scandinavian Telemark goats, is also believed by some to have played a part in the English development of the breed.

At any rate, these Saanens made a big impact on Saanen breeders, bringing size and sturdiness for which the breed is known today. They *also* brought *color*. Several of them were known to have produced colored kids in England prior to their export and a number produced colored kids in this country, further adding to the store of colored genes in the gene pool.

The first formal association of breeders of the colored Saanen took place in 1974, when the Sable Breeders Association was formed. This group presented a proposal to ADGA asking that Sables be recognized as a breed and a registry and herdbook provided for them. This proposal was made in 1978 and rejected in a close vote by ADGA. In 1981, a breed standard for the Sable was added to the appendix of the ADGA Guidebook, however. After this, the SBA declined and finally disbanded. (*Editor note: This was largely due to the disappearance of many of their records due to an unfortunate situation. However, many of these records were later either recovered or rebuilt through information provided by ex-SBA members*). A new association, the International Sable Breeders Association was formed in 1996, however, and another proposal for a herdbook was presented in 1999. This, too, was rejected. A new proposal is now being developed and perhaps the third time will be the charm

