

## **In Praise of Ginger Cats**

*Behind every successful man there is  
a woman and behind every successful  
woman there is a cat...*

While cats have been with us throughout millennia, our liking of these furry creatures has escalated to a full blown cat craze pretty recently which, coincidentally, has coincided with the advent of Internet era (for, as we all know, the Internet is made of cats :) They come in dozens of different colors and patterns, black, white, ginger, gray, calico, and tortoiseshell being the most common. Despite some negative superstitions, black cats are the most iconic felines on the Internet. White cats enjoy almost half of black cats' popularity, followed closely by – you've guessed it, – ginger cats!

Although far from being quite as popular as black cats, ginger cats are definitely in the lead and are just as every bit instagrammable as their black peers. These furry creatures with coats of red and hearts of gold make purrfect playmates, powerful antidepressants and simply great pets. This is the reason why this particular cat coat color has captured so many hearts. Some people go as far as to celebrate Ginger Cat Appreciation Day (September 1<sup>st</sup>), although, if you're one of the lucky ginger cat owners, there's no reason you shouldn't make this day special, for why not make an excuse to give that extra attention to your fur baby he or she deserves!

### **Ginger Cat Genetics**

It has been scientifically proven that orange gene, O/o, is sex-linked. As we know, females have two X chromosomes while males have an X and a Y chromosome. Since the orange gene is linked to an X chromosome, females are less likely to be born with red coat because in that case both of her parents need to pass on the gene.

The second thing about ginger cat coat is that it can never be “solid” orange. There always needs to be some kind of pattern. Specialists distinguish five types of

orange coat patterns: ticked tabby, spotted tabby, mackerel tabby, patched tabby and, of course, classic tabby. The latter would have a butterfly pattern on his back (just like you see in the picture) or a bull's-eye pattern on his sides.

A spotted tabby would share a lot with his wild cousins (leopards, jaguars, cheetahs, ocelots and others) and, as the name suggests, would have some distinct spots on his fur.

A patched tabby has blotchy markings along with some stripes. The thing about patched tabbies is that some of their stripes may be quite broader than the others.

The mackerel tabby bears a striking resemblance to the tiger. His stripes run perpendicular to the spine while the stripes on his legs and tail may have ring-like appearance.

Finally, a ticked pattern emerges in cats who have most of their markings on the face while the rest of the body bears almost no stripes or they are not quite distinct and have low contrast.

Another part of ginger cat genetics deals with eye color. The majority of ginger cats have green or yellow eyes. Some of the cats would have eyes with metallic tint to it, like copper or bronze, for example, but they're not as common. Keep in mind that at birth, all kittens have blue eyes which will later change color.

While there hasn't been found any evidence to suggest any disease predisposition in orange cats, we believe that some of their behavioral characteristics put them at risk. Orange cats have a tendency to overeating and being lazy. You can see how it can play out into the problems with high cholesterol and blood sugar levels which can predispose your kitty to obesity, type 2 diabetes, arthritis and some other diseases. So if you want to be a good cat mom, make sure your cat's diet is properly balanced and they're not overeating. If they're already on the pudgy side, don't worry and consult your vet on how to normalize the cat's body weight. And don't forget about playtime! Playing is extremely important for cats' mental health and it does help to keep those extra pounds at bay!

The pigment responsible for ginger coat in cats is called pheomelanin. The amount of this pigment determines the intensity of fur color which can range from rich reddish brown or orange to peach color and even pale yellow. As for the breeds that can have this pigment, the list is pretty long and includes virtually every cat breed there is. Some of the breeds that can be red are British Shorthairs, Maine Coons, American Bobtails, Munchkins, Egyptian Maus, Persians, Abyssinians, Bengals and many more. As you know, some of these breeds tend to have short or long hair. The length of the hair depends solely on the breed and is in no way linked to orange gene.

There is some evidence that suggests orange tabbies are predisposed to having black freckles. These can easily be spotted on a cat's lips and thinnest parts of his skin. Cats typically develop freckles at 1 or 2 years of age. However, the freckles shouldn't bother you as these markings are completely benign and have nothing to do with skin cancer.

### **Personality**

Some people might ask, does red coat mean a heart of gold? Most owners would probably say that their fur babies are world's biggest sweethearts. However favorably prejudiced they might be, there is no behavioral evidence that tells otherwise. In fact, a recent study at the University of California showed that orange tabbies are most frequently described as "friendly" by cat owners.

However, in terms of activity level, ginger cats can fall on either side of the spectrum. Some turn out to be pretty laid-back guys and make purrfect lap buddies while others are restless and prone to all kinds of antics and adventure seeking. It should be noted that most orange cats tend to fall on the former end of the spectrum. Some tend to be quite shy and exhibit "stranger danger" behavior while others can be outgoing and seek attention even from strangers. A cat's behavior largely depends on its experiences as a kitten (e.g., timing of the weaning process, its early interactions with humans and other cats), even more so than it does on any given breed, coat color and the genes that

go along with it. A young ginger cat with energetic disposition can make a purrfect playmate for a kid and a more mature laid-back or even old and low-energy cat can become a lap buddy for someone who's older.

Ginger cats are known to be pretty vocal. So if you like silence you should keep this in mind before adopting an orange cutie. Another behavioral issue that may arise is their big appetite. Of course, a real cat's appetite comes nothing close to that of grotesquely voracious Garfield, but you still need to regularly monitor your cat's weight in order to prevent some common obesity-related problems such as diabetes and arthritis.

### **Common names**

Interestingly, ginger cats tend to have food-related names like Marmalade, Cinnamon or Ginger. Marmalade is a type of jam made from juice and peel of citrus fruits. If you are a fruit lover you also can name your kitty after some orange or red fruit, for example, Apricot, Peach, Mango, Tangerine, Kumquat or Persimmon. Such a name suggests your kitty is so adorable and cute you want to eat them. If you like veggies, perhaps, such names as Pumpkin, Butternut or even Carrot may be your name of choice. With this being said, don't limit yourself with food or color analogies. Naming your cat after famous book character might be a good idea. Aslan can be a fitting name since he is a beloved feline character from C.S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia* series. You might opt for a Harry Potter-themed name like Crookshanks (Hermione Granger's cat). If you like comic books, perhaps, you remember Hobbes, an orange cat from *Calvin and Hobbes* comic strip. Cartoon character names like Garfield, Dory, Simba and others can be especially fitting for a mischievous and not not quite well behaved cats.

### **Symbolism of the color orange**

The brightness of the color orange symbolizes enthusiasm and excitement. The ones drawn to this color are full of energy and charisma. It immediately claims your

attention, that's why it's so popular in advertisement. Some people have food-related associations with the color orange that we've talked about in our previous section.

In the USA and other English speaking countries orange is culturally linked to Halloween and therefore may bear some dark connotations.

Unfortunately, some people don't like the color orange because it's too eye-catching, too dramatic and loud for them. Even though color preferences are a matter of personal choice, the color orange is universally known to elicit positive response in most people, whether they perceive it as warm and welcoming or bold and daring.

### **Orange cat as an inspiration**

Ginger cats have received a fair share of representation in popular culture. Take, for example, Hermione's half-kneazle Crookshanks or a luscious ginger cat from *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. Many cats with youtube fame have red fur, think of Marmalade from Cole and Marmalade's channel or Haku and Nagi from Rachel and Jun's channel.

Ginger cats often are involved in some tear-jerking stories. One of such stories that went viral in 2018 tells us about Perry Martin's cat Thomas Jr. The cat went missing in 2004 after a hurricane in Florida. The owner searched for Thomas for months but to no avail. 14 years later, when he had long since given up hope, Perry was contacted by someone from the vet office telling him they miraculously have found the cat. The owner couldn't believe his luck when he was finally reunited with Thomas, only to lose him again two weeks later, but this time – to a deadly illness...

Another touching story involves a stray cat and a busker from London. You probably have guessed by this point who are we talking about. Of course, it's James Bowen and Bob! This is an example of an extraordinary friendship between human and his furry friend that turned out to be life-changing for James. His book, *A Street Cat Named Bob*, has quickly become a bestseller and continues to capture readers' hearts.

Many celebrities own orange tabbies, for example, Ian Somerhalder (Moke), Bella Thorne (Lola), James McVey (Colonel Mickey), James Franco (Sammy) and lots of others. All of these cats have risen to a staggering instafame much like their owners.

### **Myths & Superstitions**

There are some superstitions surrounding an M-shaped pattern above ginger cats' eyes. As the legend has it, Mother Mary kissed a tabby cat on the forehead for keeping little Jesus warm at night. According to Islamic tradition, this marking appeared when prophet Muhammad petted a cat on the head after it protected him from a cobra. In Ancient Egypt, an M on a cat's forehead stood for Mau (an onomatopoeic word they used for all cats).

Interestingly, cats are represented disproportionately throughout different religions. While the Bible has almost no cat references, Islamic tradition has plenty of them. It's widely known that Muhammad revered cats. According to one legend, he once fell asleep with a cat lying on his sleeve. But when he woke up and had to leave quickly to attend a prayer session, he found that the kitty was still lying peacefully on his sleeve, sleeping. He then took a knife and cut the sleeve so as not to disturb the cat and left. Mohamed's loyal feline friend was called Muezza. She would often rest on his lap while he was giving sermons.

In Buddhism, cats represent spirituality and are believed to host holy human souls after death. Many Buddhist monks and nuns believe in the healing powers of these animals. Cats are believed to have access to other worlds and spiritual realms.

So, as evidenced by countless myths and superstitions, cats play an important role in our collective subconsciousness. And much like ancient Egyptians, who revered cats by drawing them on walls, we celebrate those furry guys by leaving their pictures on our social media walls. Time passes, kings and queens die, regimes change and myths are born and ruined many times over but what is of the essence always remains... and that is CATS.