



Californian Satins

The Aristocrats of the Rabbit World

By Clarence W. Linsey, Olathe, KS

I believe that the Californian Satin is the most beautiful of the rabbit world. To me there is no rabbit as pretty as a Californian Satin that has dark markings and great sheen. One of the problems with raising Californian Satins is keeping the markings as dark as possible. This is especially a problem in the warmer parts of the country since the dark markings fade during warm weather. It is possible for some rabbits to lose essentially all of their markings. When the temperature cools down, these rabbits should have their markings reappear. Many have suggested ways to make the markings darker. One suggestion is to cross with a Black Satin. Some breeders have been successful with this procedure. Another suggestion is to keep the Californian Satins in the coolest part of the barn. Some breeders even keep them in air-conditioned areas.

Genetically speaking, the Californian should be an all black rabbit. However, this color gene is a heat sensitive gene. Only the coolest part of the body will show the dark color. Geneticists have proven that the color gene in Californian marked rabbits is heat sensitive by shaving a portion of the pelt and putting ice on the shaved area. Soon dark colored fur will appear where the pelt was shaved. During the winter you will often find the young kits to be almost black in the nest box. This is caused when the young are chilled. The old time breeders believed that these kits would have the best markings when mature. I knew a breeder who would place the young in the refrigerator in order to bring out the dark coloring. I have not found the young who are frosted to develop into adults with better colored markings.

One problem which breeders in the northern part of the country have to deal with is smut. Smut is colored fur on any usable portion of the pelt. Smut is permitted on the dewlap. If the rabbit gets a portion of his body chilled, smut can occur since the new fur may come in black. This is usually a problem with older rabbits but may also be seen in juniors. Often the Californian doe will develop black patches where she has pulled fur for the nest box. Generally, this is of little concern since most breeders do not show their breeding stock.

Some breeders have tried to improve the body type of the Californian Satin by breeding with a White Satin. One should be careful when a White Satin is used to improve the Californian. The markings are often diluted and one can have white toenails showing up. The Californian Satin should have dark toenails. I have never used a White in our breeding program since it is a challenge enough trying to keep the marking dark in our climate.

If one likes to show meat pens, the Californian Satin can be a good variety to raise. This is one time when you can show the young that have been frosted in the nest box. Most Californian Satins mature early and are good for meat production. We have won several shows with our Californian Satin meat pens.