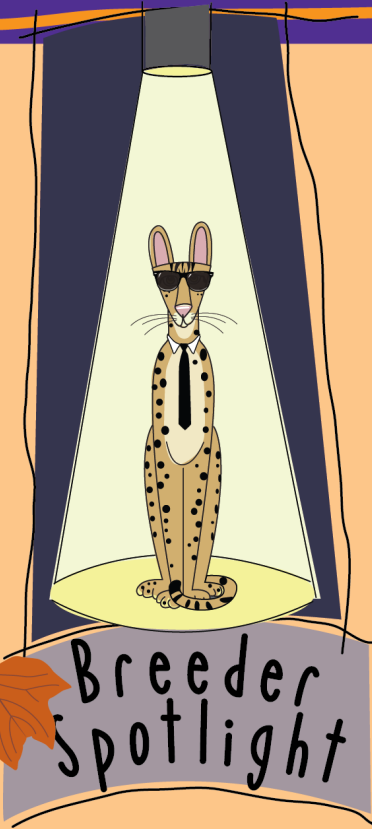


Breeder Spotlight

An interview with KIREMBO
SAVANNAHS' Brigitte Moyne



Future Queen F2
Kamaria bred by
Kelly Sheppard of
Wyldthingz



Savannahs, Breeding, Ownership Tips, and the Future Brigitte Moyne



How'd you come up with your cattery name of Kirembo Savannahs?

We liked the idea of an African name, and when looking for names, we discovered Kirembo means "beauty spot," and that seemed perfect.

Please tell us about yourself and what brought you to the U.S. from your birthplace, Australia.

I was born in Sydney and raised in various locations around the country, both city and rural. I came back to Sydney for university. I have a Bachelor of Science with a double major in Biochemistry and Microbiology, and a Doctorate (Ph.D.) in Microbiology. I've only worked in laboratory research, with some semesters of teaching Medical and Optometry students. When I finished my doctorate in Microbiology (looking in detail at a specific bacterium that causes the majority of contact lens infections), I contacted various experts in my field about post-doctoral fellowships and obtained funding for a position at the University of California, Berkeley for a year. I got talked into another year, and it was that year I met my now-husband. He's the reason I stayed in the U.S., as I had won a prestigious Australian Fellowship that paid for two years' research in the U.S. then two years back in Australia to establish myself as a researcher. When planning to go back to Australia, we evaluated our relationship and ended up eloping to Vegas (with an Elvis wedding, no less). Eventually, my mentor started pushing me to apply for tenure track (professor positions), and I was unsure that it was for me. I quit my job, and that's when we got our first Savannah, an F2 male, as a pet in 2001. We were fascinated, and I was intrigued at the possibility of helping to develop a cat breed as exciting as the Savannah cat. I'd never considered cat breeding before. It seemed more a case of mating to preserve the looks you already had there, but the development of a hybrid cat breed was different. I became hooked, and I had the time and energy.

What's the best part about breeding?

Kittens! They are the cutest wastes of our time, so much fun! Additionally, I've enjoyed them as examples of biology and genetics and the randomness of inheritance (the scientist in me).

What's the worst/hardest part about breeding?

Losing kittens. Unfortunately, I've had to accept I can't save them all...no matter the vet bills, the willingness to pay anything, a newborn kitten is impossible to do all we can do for a newborn human. Their size makes it all so impossible. Being trained as a scientist, I've always been happy to consult vet theriogenologists (reproductive vets) and do all I can. I've hooked up tummy monitors to my cats and used handheld ultrasounds to monitor pregnancies. I've accepted that I can minimize losses by doing the appropriate testing of my breeding cats and paying attention to nutrition, etc., but I can't prevent the occasional heartbreak. Each time I've lost a kitten, I've wanted to quit breeding. Breeding truly is a balance between the pain of the losses and the joys of the kittens that thrive.

Do you recommend people try breeding Savannahs? Why/Why not?

Honestly, if I'd known how complicated cat breeding was, I'm not sure I would've bred cats. I'd assumed that growing up with parents who bred horses and dogs; I was realistic in my expectations. I figured, "how different could it be"? Ha! Cats are NOT dogs, and most definitely not when it comes to breeding. If only stud service or A.I. (artificial insemination) were options in cats, it'd be much easier. Cats don't accept strange cats, so merely bringing your female cat to have a quick date with a male cat isn't going to go well most of the time. The diseases that can cause feline infertility are a big additional reason breeders don't offer their studs up to strangers. So unlike a dog, where you might keep one female and have it bred and enjoy the babies...cat breeding requires you to do more and deal with more. Intact male cats are smelly and unpredictable. They need housing outside of your house. Savannahs can be even more complicated, as male infertility is still a factor in our breed. You must have more than one male potentially for that, and additionally, many Savannah females are picky and may not appreciate the male you've carefully selected for her! You may need a plan B and a Plan C.

What's the best tip or advice you've received from another breeder?

"Breed the pedigree, not the cat." Don't just look at the cat when deciding to select it for breeding, not that you shouldn't consider their individual type. But genetics being what they are, the traits of the parents and grandparents can carry through. "Always ask for the contract before sending money." It seems obvious, but so many people rush in excited and don't consider this. When purchasing a breeding animal, you want to know if fertility is guaranteed and what that entails. Same with the health guarantee, especially things that might preclude breeding the cat even if the cat won't die.

What's the biggest strength of the Savannah breed?

The biggest strength has been that all generations, and even nonstandard colors and patterns, are fantastic pet options. Many breeds must cope with nonstandard kittens in their development being harder to place. They don't have the exciting traits that the breed offers. The straight-eared Scottish Folds, the hairy Sphynx outcrosses, the normal-coated Lykois...from our very first generation; Savannahs (fertile or not, standard coloring or not) are ALL sought after. Maybe this is because the Savannah personality is a draw, no matter the generation or coloring/pattern. Savannahs are wonderful, energetic, interactive companions.

What's the biggest weakness of the Savannah breed?

I hesitate to say this, but the weakness of our "breed," which strictly speaking is the purebred Savannah, the SBT (Stud Book Tradition). The weakness is the appeal of the early generations of Savannahs. F1 and F2 Savannahs are so dramatic and eye-catching; it overshadows our later generations and takes the focus away from working on developing our SBTs. This challenge is different from the Bengal, as the ALC (Asian Leopard Cat) is not as gregarious as the African Serval. The early generation Bengals aren't nearly as popular with the pet buyers, and so attention and energy have gone into creating their purebred SBTs that can be so spectacular. I believe this hampers our breed by something that's also great. I love the E.G.s (early generations), but I also can see that this isn't truly a "breed."

What's the most important thing a breeder does?

Be thoughtful. Thoughtful in the matings to create new litters and thoughtful in doing due diligence with testing our breeding cats. Be thoughtful about socializing kittens, so they become lovely pets for their new homes.

What should new breeders know about breeding they probably haven't considered?

Most new breeders haven't considered the need for stud housing. They hope their male kitten will be a rare one who doesn't spray because he'll be so happy he won't feel the need. Spraying is an urge for a male to advertise his presence by putting his stinky pee all over. But even if you have a rare intact male cat who only urinates in the litterbox, that urine is pungent, like skunk-level pungent. It'll permeate your entire home. Even if you put an enclosure in your basement, you need to consider venting and fans because you'll smell it. And if placed outside in an enclosure, he'll howl and pee to let girl cats know where he is. Consider how close your neighbors are and how tolerant, because howling's at night!

What's a typical day/routine at your cattery like?

My cattery is my pet household at present. I'm between studs because I downsized drastically during my two complicated pregnancies. I've always preferred keeping my queens as my house pets. It's meant a LOT of cleaning, as when in heat, intact females can also spray. I order enzyme cleaner by the gallon and clean continually; it's seemed at times. So my day is mostly now feeding and playing.

How's your family involved in your cattery, and what is a typical day for you?

My husband is always involved. He's often the midwife for kitten births as our female cats strongly desire us to be with them, and he's very patient and will sit for hours holding paws (literally) and urging them to push and reassuring them.

Have you taken up raw feeding?

My very first pet Savannah back in 2001, insisted on raw meat, so we've offered a raw diet since. I do prefer my cats also to eat a canned diet to make traveling to cat shows easier. (Flying across the country with frozen meat in your baggage can be messy!) and also offer a freeze-dried diet occasionally. I like the Mazuri small feline supplement with the raw we offer.

If not raw feeding, what food brands/types do you recommend?

We've found most of our Savannahs don't like the pate' type of cat foods, so the canned food we offer is "Wellness Morsels chicken" and "Earthborn Holistics chicken." Our cats don't tend to enjoy the fishy flavors. We also provide "Feline Natural" and "Stella & Chewy's freeze-dried" cat diets at times.

Do you or have you bred any other type of cat or animal?

No, I'd never felt the need to breed animals. The Savannah cat was merely inspirational.

What do you think about the phasing out of F1 Savannahs?

I don't like the idea of never having F1 Savannahs available. We on the Savannah Breed Committee are doing what we can to work out an acceptable compromise with TICA. Even if TICA decides not to register them, they'll still exist. Breeding of F1s won't stop because of a lack of registration papers. It'll be a loss to our breed, though if TICA doesn't register F1s, they won't be used in programs to breed down to the SBT level.

What about F2s and F3s being phased out?

Similar to F2s and F3s, our breed is in no way ready to only breed SBTs to each other. We are decades behind the Bengal breed. Our path's been more complicated with worse fertility issues and needs to distinguish ourselves from that already-existing "wild-looking" cat breed.

What about Savannah Cat websites? Do you have a favorite?

www.savannahcatchat.com is an excellent resource, besides the rapidly growing information base on <https://www.savannahgans.com/>

What do you do when you want to take a vacation?

We've been lucky to have friends who like to hang out in our house. Most of our trips over the decades we've had one of two close friends stay at the house. Last time we went overseas, one of our friends had actually moved overseas so we paid his return fare from Europe so he could visit friends and stay at our house and thus petsit.

What else would you like the Savannah world to know about you and your cattery?

I don't produce kittens often, and they're spoiled terribly before leaving here. I firmly believe my responsibility to the kitten lives I bring into this world lasts for their lifetime.



<http://www.kirembosavannahs.com>

Cats of
Kirembo
Savannahs



Our Progression to SBT

Karamu



F2A

Kiki



F3B

Thandi



F4C

*Kiri,
Mauser,
Mukee*



F5SBT