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# Ancient Middle Eastern Mountain Cat

## The Turkish Van

by Denise Raupach, et al

Facing Page: SGCA Kayserai Chaldea of Howling Coyote  
B: Barbara Lindsay, O: Kerry Dolan, Photo © Vickie

### Early History

Turkish Vans are an ancient breed of cat that had their beginnings in the rugged mountains of the Lake Van region in what is now eastern Turkey. Vans are one of the oldest known domesticated cat breeds and are the oldest recorded semi-longhaired breed, arguably, the ancestor of all semi-longhair breeds. The ancient roots of the Van Cats can be seen in the legends and artifacts from the Van region of Turkey. Local legends and belief, in various forms, state that the Van Cat accompanied Noah on the Ark and gained its fondness for water when, being impatient, jumped off the Ark and swam to shore. Though it is interesting to note that those who live and work with Vans think it is just as likely that the cats fell off the Ark. Whatever the case, Lake Van, does in fact lie in close proximity to Mount Ararat where the biblical account of Noah is given, and, on clear days, the mountain can be seen from the lake. In this remote region, Van cats have adapted to living under the harshest conditions in their natural

habitat as eastern Turkey faces extremes of weather in both winter and summer. This explains their water resistant, single coat that has notable length variations during the seasonal changes.

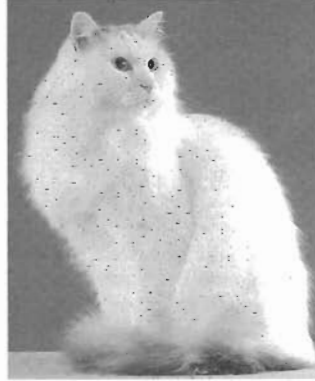
During their long history, the Turkish Van has become a revered symbol of various tribes and groups of people inhabiting the Van region. Artifacts show these cats were favored in ancient societies for their beauty and strength, being featured on Hittite jewelry as well as Roman armor and shields. Although both patterned and white cats inhabit the region around Lake Van, the Armenians consider the patterned cat as a national symbol, while the all white, odd eyed variety, is treasured by the Turkish people. Because the all white Turkish Van was treasured so greatly by the Turkish people, the government did not, until recently, allow the all white Van to leave Turkey. Even now, a permit is required to export an all white Turkish Van. This accounts for the fact that the patterned cat was believed by many people and breeders to be the only authentic Turkish Van.

Below: Lake Van with Mt. Ararat in background, Photo Toin de Groot





Left: Ayden's Kittens, B/O: Barbara Lindsay  
Right: RW QGC Kayserai Checkers, B/O: Barbara Lindsay



Left: Gyurtsutarjan Kar Topu, B: Mr. Peter Siffels, O: Klaus & Ela Eberlein  
Right: GCCF GP Rowvanca Sukurnaz Turklyyn, B: Mr & Mrs J Pinder, O: Mrs Val Bibby, Photo © Stephen Ward



Left: Goliath Osman von Esiehma, B: Manuela Heise, O: Toin and Marion de Groot  
Right: Ceyhan's Sevgi, B: Orhan Yilmaz, O: Toin & Marion de Groot



Van Gölü's Ayse  
B: Toin de Groot, O: Toin & Marion de Groot

Al Walburn with Kayserai Fausi  
B/O: Barbara Lindsay

## The Turkish Van Enters the Cat Fancy

The world took notice of the Turkish Van again beginning in 1954, when two British photographers, Laura Lushington and Sonia Halliday, working for the Turkish Tourism Board were given an unrelated pair of the patterned kittens as a gift during the course of their work and travels through Turkey. When they arrived home a year later, the cats bred together and the women were presented with patterned kittens almost identical to their parents. They named this "new breed", the Turkish Cat.

With the cattery name of "Van", and the assistance of experienced cat breeders, Lushington and Halliday decided to acquire more of the cats and proceeded to set up a breeding program. Five more cats were imported; all of these cats were auburn and white with amber eyes, providing the foundation for developing the breed. The two women worked in Britain to get the breed recognized by the Governing Council of the Cat Fancy (GCCF) as the Turkish Cat. They were successful; the Turkish Cat was accepted for Championship status in 1969.

By the time the cats were accepted for championship in the GCCF, other breeders had begun to work with the cats using offspring from the original seven imports. As breedings occurred and litters came, the color cream and white resulted as well as cats with blue and odd eyes. The genetics of the piebald gene and the recessive dilute were not widely known, so kittens born with these colors were rejected and petted out as these colors were considered a flaw and not up to par with what was considered a proper Turkish Cat. Both Lushington and Halliday protested the inclusion of cream and white and the different eye colors into the breed. Some breeders felt a true Turkish Cat was only auburn and white with amber eyes. Most of the other breeders embraced cream with white and the new eye colors. Lushington retired from breeding in 1984 and gave up the Van prefix to the GCCF to be used for the breed. In June 1985, the breed name was officially changed from Turkish Cat to Turkish Van. After a fair amount of resistance, the cream and whites were recognized in 1986, but the odd eye/blue eye colors took another two years, not being accepted and recognized until June 1988. In June 2000, other coat colors – black and white, tortie and white, and their dilutes and tabby variations – were accepted at the Championship level. GCCF accepted the White Turkish Van for Preliminary Recognition in February 2005 as the Turkish Vankedis. Vankedis is Turkish for "Van Cat".

## The Turkish Van in TICA

The Turkish Van as a natural breed was accepted for championship status into TICA when TICA was organized in 1979. Jack and Barbara Reark were two of the twelve people who were at the meeting which gave rise to TICA as an association and registry. They imported the first Turkish Vans into the United States in 1983. The Rearks originally entered the cats in the NBC (New Breed or Color) class. However, then Vice President Larry Paul brought to their attention the fact that the Turkish Van was grandfathered in as a championship breed because of its status in the GCCF. There was one difference however, unlike GCCF, TICA accepted all the eye colors and traditional particulars from the very beginning.

The Rearks' first Van, a male, came from France. Later in the year, they imported a female kitten from the same French breeder. Their next three imports were from the Netherlands, done with the intention of increasing the gene pool in the US. When they started breeding their cats, they specifically wanted to place them with people who would breed and show them and as a result, promote and help establish the breed in the U.S. It was their cat – Matabiru Evenrude Vango – to which the breed standard was written. To date, many patterned cats in a variety of colors have been registered and shown in TICA. As of May 2007, the all white Turkish Van will be shown in Championship competition.

## Personality Characteristics

Turkish Vans are the second largest breed in the domestic cat world. Vans are intelligent, energetic, stubborn, loyal, friendly and doglike cats. They can be slow to forgive a slight, but return kindness and love many times over. Their muscular body, energy, and large size can make them agile but sometimes less than graceful. It is not

uncommon for a Van to just fall off a table or counter, either because he is not paying attention (which is why some think they fell off the ark) or the cat thought that the newspaper extending past the counter surface would hold him up. Be aware, Vans' muscular hind legs give them the ability to jump to the top of the refrigerator from a cold start on the floor, and if they don't quite make it, they can use their powerful shoulder and chest muscles to pull themselves up to the top, so it might be a mistake to store that ceramic cookie jar on top of the refrigerator. They are a VERY curious breed and when you bring them home they will have to check out every nook and cranny of your house before they will be satisfied. One must be very cautious to 'Van proof' the house from that door opening or cabinet opening cat.

Turkish Vans display their doglike characteristics by bonding very closely with their people and will follow their people about during their daily activities. They are possessive and may resent it if they are separated from their person by a door. Vans are protective to the point that one might mistake them for a watch dog in a cat's body. Vans being alert and pacing in front of the door when visitors arrive is not uncommon. They do, however, get along great with other pets that they live with, including other cats, dogs, and even ferrets. Vans have been observed sleeping and playing with dogs and on one occasion, a Van was witnessed riding on the back of a large dog. You can train these cats to walk on a lead and many of them play fetch. You quickly figure out what this cat wants when he or she drops his favorite toy at your feet. It is quite comical but after you get into a routine of pitching the toy and the cat brings it back for more, you both end up having fun and getting exercise. They are cats that do better with interactive play time with their owners than being alone, but having said that, it is important to have a good variety of toys for them to play with or another cat for company, when they are alone.

Vans are also fascinated by water, which probably dates back to them using lakes and streams to cool off in during the hot summers in eastern Turkey. Sinks and showers with running water being favorite gathering places, as are the new fountain type drink wells. Never leave a full sink, hot tub, or bath unattended with a hot Van near by unless you are amused by wet cats. All Vans seem to have this affinity for water to some degree or other, which is why they are known as The Swimming Cats but the white Vans often take it to the next level and will insist on watching when you turn on a tap.

You can often tell how a Turkish Van is feeling by its tail. They are very expressive with their tails, the tail being in motion quite frequently even when the cat is sleeping. Some Vans have been known to sleep on their tails to stop this "flouncing" from waking them up. Vans, as stated earlier, get along well with other pets but will often show a preference for their own kind. It is said that you do not get the full Van experience unless you have two or more Vans. Two vans in a group of cats will "hang" together and in a group of Vans, the females, being the more intelligent of the sexes, will take great delight in ambushing the males, engaging them in playful boxing matches, or hiding their toys. Whatever the scenario the male Van often seems perplexed by the tactics of the females. Males, on the other hand, being the more clever of the sexes, are best described as charming rogues. With their various personality quirks they are able to win over even those few who claim not to like cats.

### Type

The Turkish Van is a large, semi-longhaired cat with a swimmer's body. Ideal type should feature broad shoulders with a body that is 'top heavy', that is a cat with its center of gravity forward. The cat is moderately long and its back legs are slightly longer than its front legs but, neither the cat itself nor its legs are so long to be disproportionate. These cats are large and muscular and feature short necks – the males can be massive and are considered the football players of the cat world.

The shoulders of the Van cat are broad with the ability for one to place three fingers between the legs at the chest area. It is said that large Van males are the only domestic cats that cannot follow their heads through a fence due to the broadness of their chest and shoulders. The rear end on the cat should not exceed the width of the shoulders – in other words, no bell bottomed or pear shape should be seen.

The ears are moderately large, wide at the base, set fairly high



Left: Van Gölü kittens, B/O: Toin & Marion de Groot  
Right: *Saskia from White Dream*, B: Stephanie Hoffmann, O: Ania Ake



Left: *El Kar San von Ararat*, B/O: Klaus & Ela Eberlein  
Right: *Urartu's Safadisi*, B: Brabara Gnichtel-Schmidt, O: Ania Ake



Left: *Aledo Osman von Alexis*, B: Sharon & Melvin Walcott, O: Marion & Ralf Schacht  
Right: Mom Antalya is from the second wave of imports from Turkey. The offspring is from Van cattery. The photo is from the late 50's or early 60's.



Left: *RW SGC Aledo's Beriki*, B/O: Sharon Walcott  
Right: *Yeni Raki Beyaz*, B: Anke & Ger Baks, O: Erica & Brad Tadjewski, Photo © Tetsu





Left: *Leonardo vom Glasbach*, B: Beate Goetz, O: Anke and Ger Baks  
Right: Pasa van Yakamoz, B/O: Jaqueline & Ibrahim Yildirim



Left: *Mihriban van Yakamoz*, B/O: Jaqueline & Ibrahim Yildirim  
Right: *Özgürs Rüstem Page*, B: Janneke Tanriovan, O: Marion & Ralf Schacht



*Urartu's Murat Van of Aledo*, B: Barbara Gnichtel-Schmidt, O: Sharon & Melvin Walcott  
*Miran Zahid van Yakamoz of Aledo*, B: Jaqueline & Ibrahim Yildirim, O: Sharon & Melvin Walcott



Left: A swimming cat; Right: *Van Guzelli Iskenderum* and her kitten *Van Kehibar*, first registered Turkish Van in Britain imported from Turkey in 1955 by Laura Lushington. Originally published in the *Complete Cat Encyclopedia*, edited by Grace Pond and published in 1972 (out of print).



From the book by Alison Ashford *Rex, Abys and Turkish Cats*. Photos were by Sonia Halliday & Anne Cumbers

and well apart. The inside edge of the ear is slightly angled to the outside with the outside edge fairly straight, but not necessarily in line with the side of the face. Tips are slightly rounded. The insides are well feathered.

A Turkish Van has eyes that are walnut or peach pit shaped. Eye colors can be blue, amber, or odd eyed (amber eyes can fade to green). The eyes are set slightly upturned in a broad head that is a modified wedge with high cheekbones.

The coat is the most fascinating trait on this cat. The climate change in Turkey throughout the year seems to have designed the cat's coat over time. Eastern Turkey is mountainous, and Lake Van sits over 5,260 ft. above sea level. The area faces such extreme temperatures during the summer and winter seasons that it is almost inhospitable. The semi-long haired, water resistant single coat, is thick in winter but very soft, like rabbit fur or cashmere. At maturity, the cat will have a winter mane. During the spring and summer months when Turkey becomes extremely hot, the long hair on the body is shed for a shorter coat that retains the cashmere feel. The hair on the tail remains long throughout the year and has the appearance of a bottle brush.

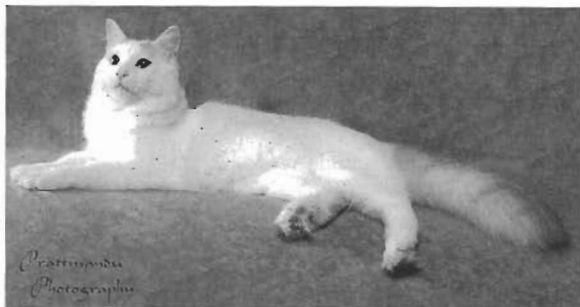
The coloring of the patterned Van cats should be limited to the head and tail with random body spots acceptable but all color should not exceed more than 20% of the entire cat. The random spots should not detract from the pattern. This would be a small color cap on the head with a white blaze to at least between the front edge of the ears, and a colored tail in any of the traditional colors. The rest of the cat is chalk white. Color can extend up the rump from the tail of the cat and patterned cats often have a random spots of color on the shoulder or body. This is acceptable as the native people see this as the "Mark of Allah" left when Allah touched the cat to give it his blessing. White Turkish Vans should be solid white.

### *Showing Tips*

Turkish Vans are strong willed, territorial, and energetic cats and as such, socialization must start at birth in order for them to succeed in a showhall. It makes a huge difference in the cats if breeders bring this breed into the house amid all the incoming and outgoing of family members, as well as daily household noises. This works to help the cats socialize and be better prepared to deal with a busy showhall. However, socialization alone is not a guarantee of showhall success. It is also important for breeders to select cats for breeding where the temperament of the parent cats are congenial and easy going in the show hall, as temperament is one of the main traits that gets passed down to the kittens. It is obvious then, that Van kittens should be shown early and often. A well socialized Turkish Van can be the easiest going cat in the world, often purring his/her way through travel, showhall and handling.

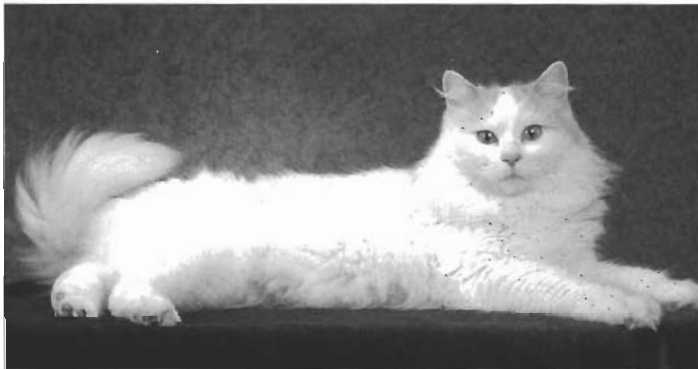
Judges should pay attention to the fact that because the Vans' center of gravity is forward, this breed prefers to be judged with all four paws firmly on the judging stand. They feel uncomfortable being picked up under their forearms and made to stand on their hind legs – because they are top heavy, the feeling of pitching forward is there. Gentle but firm handling is important for all breeds but especially so for the Turkish Van.

Turkish Vans are stunningly handsome cats and are a natural treasure that deserves to be preserved. We are committed to helping TICA become the preserving registry of the Turkish Van cat – the cat that the Turkish and Armenian people so highly treasure.



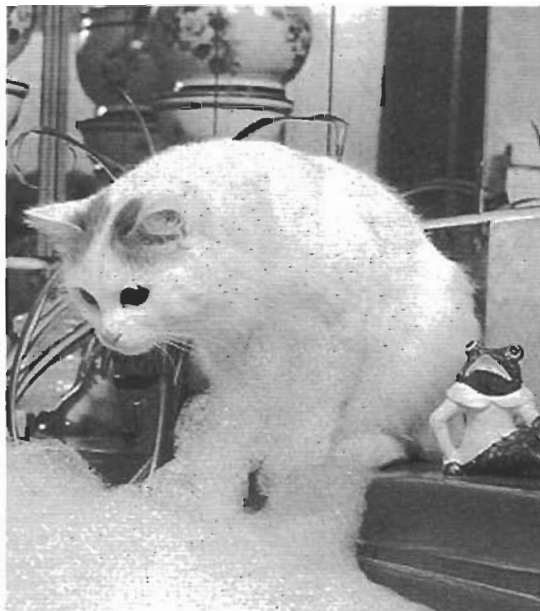
**Vanjas Kaskaval of Halima**, B: Cecilia Kjellman & Mats Mohlin, O: Brad & Erica Tadjewski  
Left: at 6 months, Middle: at 8 months, and Right at 1 year. These photos show how a Van develops.

**RW Kinali Casus Erkek of Kayserai**  
B: Ania Ake, O: Barbara Lindsay, Photo © Prattmando



2001 Best Van & 2004 Best Alter: **QGC & SGA RW Loussirane de Kapoutan Lidj**  
O: Joyce Ouderkerk, photo © G. Scheffer

Left: **Kayserai Finola**, B/O: Barbara Lindsey  
Right: **Kinali Enik**, B/O: Ania Ake



**QGC Halima Thalia**  
B/O: Erica & Brad Tadjewski

2001 Best Van & 2004 Best Alter: **QGC & SGA RW Loussirane de Kapoutan Lidj**. O: Joyce Ouderkerk, photo © G. Scheffer



**Demet Van Kedi von Alexis**  
B: Marion Schacht, O: Kathy Schulz

**Cheraton's Peach Melba**, B: Mr Brett & Mrs Cheryl Hassell, O: Mrs Melva Eccles. Photo © Marc Henrie appeared on front cover of *Cat World*



**Pernic Aeligzandra**, Auburn odd-eyed  
B/O: Mrs Alex Wake, Photo © PhotoCat



**TGA Aghtamar's Bezdik Van**, B/O: Joyce Ouderkerk

**Urartu's Rana of Aledo**, B: Barbara Gnichtel-Schmidt, O: Sharon & Melvin Walcott

Van Statue in town of Van, Turkey, Photo © Flickr.com

# TICA Turkish Van Breed Winners

**1988**

*Cat* CH Matabiru Evinrude Vango, O: Lori Meinecke  
*Kitten* Matabiru Evinrude Vango, O: Lori Meinecke  
*Alter* DGC Matabiru Timber, O: Nancy Scharfe

**1989**

*Cat* QGC Vansalot Cinnabarr, O: Lori Meinecke  
*Kitten* Vansalot Cinnabarr, O: Lori Meinecke  
*Alter* TGC Matabiru Timber, O: Nancy Scharfe

**1990**

*Cat* TGC Matabiru Hamlet, O: Barbara & Jack Reark  
*Kitten* Vansalot Technicolor Dreamcoat, O: Mike & Lori Meinecke  
*Alter* QGC Vansalot Cinnabarr, O: Lori Meinecke

**1991**

*Cat* SGC Matabiru Purr Fecto of Ishcatts, O: F. & L. Szablowski  
*Kitten* Pairodocs I Van The Terrible, O: Debbie Hayes & Karen Hooker  
*Alter* SGC Vansalot Moonstruck, O: Mike & Lori Meinecke

**1992**

*Cat* QGC Pairodocs I Van The Terrible, O: K. Hooker & D. Hayes  
*Kitten* Ishcatts Rocky Road, O: Frank & Laura Szablowski  
*Alter* SGC Pairodocs Eric The Awful, O: Kevin J. Usher

**1993**

*Cat* SGC Pairodocs Fisher King, O: Karen Hooker & Deborah Hayes  
*Kitten* Pairodocs Fisher King, O: Karen Hooker & Deborah Hayes  
*Alter* SGC Pairodocs Pinochat, O: Karen Hooker & Debbie Hayes

**1994**

*Cat* QGC Pairodocs Mario Vandretti, O: D. Hayes & K. Hooker  
*Kitten* Balivan Man The Van, O: Barbara Reark & Bruce Ferguson  
*Alter* SGC Pairodocs Atilla The Van, O: K. Hooker & D. Hayes

**1995**

*Cat* SGC Pairodocs Harlequin Dancer, O: D. Hayes & K. L. Hooker  
*Kitten* Pairodocs Quiana, O: Deborah C. Hayes & K.L. Hooker  
*Alter* SGC Pairodocs Socorro, O: Deborah Hayes & Karen Hooker

**1996**

*Cat* Pairodocs Tekin, O: Deborah Hayes & Karen Hooker  
*Kitten* Pairodocs Lucille, O: Karen Hooker & Deborah Hayes  
*Alter* SGA Pairodocs Pestarosa, O: Karen Hooker & Deborah Hayes

**1997**

*Cat* QGC Pairodocs Bertrand Russell, O: K. Hooker & D. Hayes  
*Kitten* Pairodocs Napoleon, O: Karen Hooker & Deborah Hayes  
*Alter* CHA Pairodocs Spooktacular Nala, O: M. Labry & D. Hayes

**1998**

*Cat* CH Pairodocs Atomic City Scrambler, O: Hooker, Hayes, Westbury  
*Kitten* Vansdelmar Alleranth of Pairodocs, O: K. Hooker & D. Hayes  
*Alter* GCA Pairodocs Spooktacular Nala, O: Patricia Karolasz

**1999**

*Cat* TGC Pairodocs Piano Man, O: Karen Hooker & Deborah Hayes  
*Kitten* Pairodocs Lil, O: Karen Hooker & Deborah Hayes  
*Alter* DGA Pairodocs Merlin, O: D. Hayes, S. Hayes & K. Hooker

**2000**

*Cat* Vansalot Kilroy, O: Lori & Mike Meinecke  
*Kitten* Pairodocs Milas, O: Karen Hooker & Deborah Hayes  
*Alter* Pairodocs Lil, O: Karen Hooker & Deborah Hayes

**2001**

*Cat* Loussirane De Kapoutan Lidj, O: Joyce Ouderkerk  
*Kitten* Pairodocs Mischief, O: Karen Hooker & Deborah Hayes  
*Alter* SGA Caravanserai Omar, O: Vicki McCarroll

**2002**

*Cat* QGC Pairodocs Happy Traveler, O: K. Hooker & D. Hayes  
*Kitten* Pairodocs Happy Traveler, O: Karen Hooker & Deborah Hayes  
*Alter* Aghtamar's Maratonagan Chirak, O: Joyce Ouderkerk

**2003**

*Cat* QGC Aledo's Beriki, O: Sharon Walcott  
*Kitten* Sazikatz Real Thing of Blueyonder, O: Crawford, Unangst & Zink  
*Alter* SGA Pairodocs Tony Montana, O: Karen Hooker & Deborah Hayes

**2004**

*Cat* SGC Aledo's Beriki, O: Sharon Walcott  
*Kitten* Aghtamar Oujov Van, O: Joyce Ouderkerk  
*Alter* QGCA Loussirane De Kapoutan Lidj, O: Joyce Ouderkerk

**2005**

*Cat* QGC Kayserai Checkers, O: Barbara Lindsey  
*Kitten* Pairodocs Mephisto, O: K. Hooker & D. Hayes  
*Alter* SGCA Pairodocs Hercules, O: Karen Hooker & Deborah Hayes

**2006**

*Cat* QGC Kinali Casus Erkek of Kayserai, O: Barbara Lindsey  
*Kitten* Pairodocs Cala Lily, O: Karen Hooker & Deborah Hayes  
*Alter* DGA Pairodocs Ranger, O: Karen Hooker & Deborah Hayes



*Latife Van Kedi von Alexis*, B: Marion Schacht, O: Ania Ake



*SGC Urartu's Zaheb of Aghtamar*, B: Barbara Gnichtel-Schmidt, O: Joyce Ouderkerk