

“It’s a really interesting phenomenon in our darling Tonks”

Have you ever heard of a fever mask? I’m going to delve into it a little more and with some really stark photos to show that indeed this should be something to take heed of if we see it.

It’s a really interesting phenomenon, well not just in Tonkinese but all colour pointed cats are documented to experience this phenomenon.

Some vets are aware of it, most are not. However, sadly there is very little conclusive written matter on the subject.

Temperature Response

Anecdotal evidence is mostly what one finds in a search online but it’s really something to take notice of.

Scientific information is still pretty weak, however the main theory is that the white “fever” hairs are the result of the fact that the usual cooler points on a Siamese/colour pointed cat are caused by a temperature response. Cooler temperatures produce the darker, more pigmented fur, while warmer areas of the body have light fur. So when a colour pointed cat gets a fever, the hairs growing in that area are pale instead of dark. This results in a “fever mask” speckled with white hair.

However, I have seen other cats get a fever mask or coat in other areas and from other causes. Such as at a dental site where it wouldn’t specifically be caused by an actual ‘fever’, however one presumes that the area is hot & inflamed which would cause the same issues.

I have known about fever masks for many years but I had never actually seen one myself in the flesh until a few of our cats

came down with an infection a few years ago (it was never fully diagnosed despite tests). Roughly 2 weeks after symptoms started a couple of my girls (Maia & Sphinx) began to develop the white hairs and it became incredibly evident!

The good news is that a fever mask will be replaced by their normal colouring in time when they have recovered from whatever caused it. The fever mask may last much longer than the issue that caused it however, because the fever mask will only fade as the hairs are replaced by new, normal growth.

Let’s look at photos and fever mask cases, I have gathered from around the Tonk World. These are so insightful and we can see that sometimes even the area of the fevermask gives us clues to what might be going on under the surface.

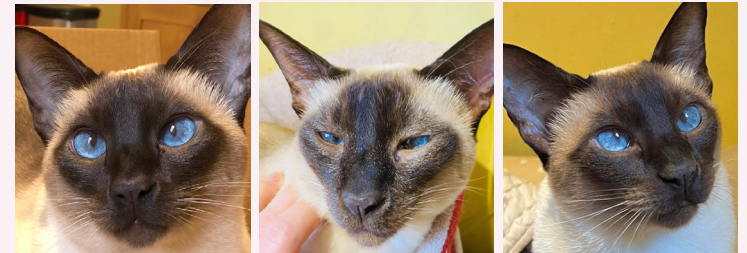
As we will see from all these really helpful photos, a fever mask is most certainly not just a made up theory. It can be incredibly helpful in diagnosing a cat or giving us a clue into something being amiss.

It is really worthwhile if you ever see this to get a check up and delve a little further into what could be the matter. Obviously we wouldn’t ever rely solely on this because, not all cats will develop a fever mask & many develop it after the problem is resolved. Fever masks are also less evident in some colours/coat patterns. Nonetheless it can be a useful tool if we spot one.

Written by Allegra Loch

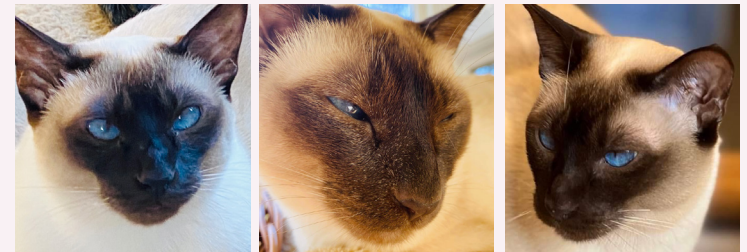
Maia Brown Point

Cause: Bacterial Infection
Photos: Before
During
After



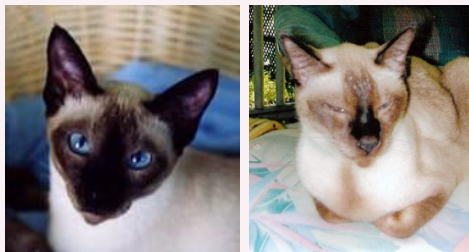
Sphinx Chocolate Point

Cause: Bacterial Infection
Photos: Before
During
After



Darcey Brown Point

Cause: hyperthyroidism
Photos: Before
During



This is Darcy owned by Karen Courtenay, she explains: “This happened to my brown point Siamese Darcy in a more extreme way when he was 9. It turned out to be the result of hyperthyroidism, which among other things raises the metabolic rate. After a course of expensive radioactive iodine therapy he was cured, and his coat went back to normal. This is what he looked like when he was sick, his lovely points almost gone.’

Zahra

Brown Point

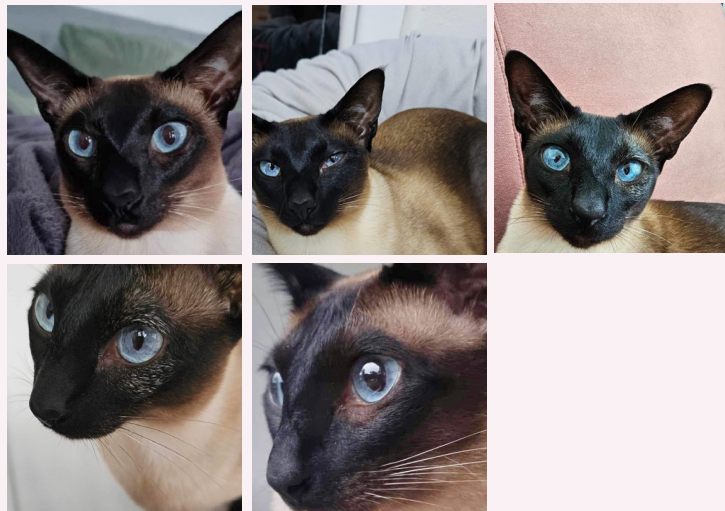
Cause:

Corneal ulcer

Photos: Before

During

After



Zahra came down with feline herpesvirus and the symptom was a corneal ulcer. As you can see from the photos above this produced a localised fever mask just around the affected eye.

Jessie first noticed some white hairs appear around one eye. A tiny clump above her eye and some sparse white hairs below. It wouldn't be noticeable on another, lighter cat but her mask is usually so dark and a single white hair, so even one or two are noticeable to her plus combined with her third eyelid not fully contracting meant that Jessie knew something was wrong and thankfully managed to get Zahra the right help with a specialist ophthalmologist.

As we can see from Zahra's example even a few changes can give us a good clue to something amiss.

Leo

Chocolate Point

Cause: Infection

Photos: During



Leo owned by Michelle Rupright Bovee in the US. Michelle posted to ask about the changes in Leo because she was worried. After receiving much advice and fever masks being mentioned, Leo was taken to the vet. He indeed had a mild temperature and an upper respiratory infection. He was given medication and has subsequently returned to his lovely self.

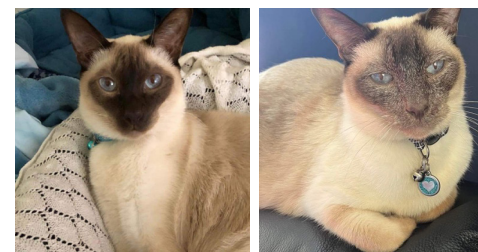
Romeo

Chocolate Point

Cause: Infection

Photos: Before

During



This is lovely Romeo owned by Rachel McGarry. "Romeo developed a fever mask aged 8. We think it was a respiratory infection, he got it off our new kitty and it's the first time he has ever gotten sick." Romeo is on the mend now so should regain his lovely dark points soon!

Ollie

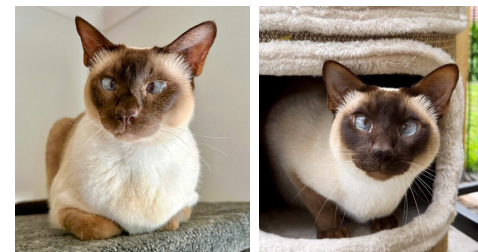
Chocolate Point

Cause:

Gum infection

Photos: During

After



Here is Ollie owned by Monique van Maanen in Australia. His fever mask followed his dental operation.

Spencer

Lilac Point

Cause: Infection
Photos: Before
During
During



This is gorgeous Spencer belonging to Alyssa Stevendale. This is a really helpful example because a fever mask is often less obvious on some of the coat patterns, but here we can see it is still very stark for Spencer who is a lilac. Spencer had gum issues resulting in this.

Duncan

Chocolate Point

Cause: Intestinal lymphoma
Photos: Before
During



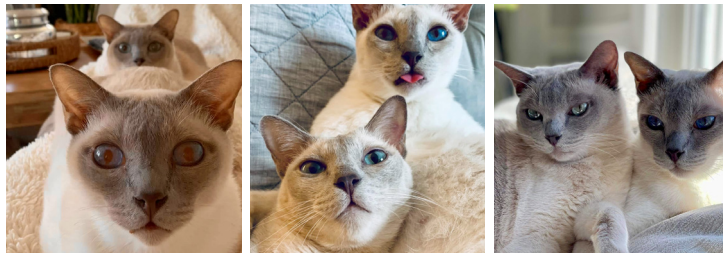
This is Duncan, a very special darling who is heartbreakingly no longer with us but his lovely owner Olivia Durant felt it important to include him for others to see and learn.

'Duncan started showing some intestinal distress at the same time as some other kitties in the household, so we assumed everyone was suffering from the same ailment. He developed the fever mask, which improved after a couple of months, but then got markedly worse just prior to him being diagnosed with intestinal lymphoma.'

Hank&Ella

Lilac Point & Lilac Mink

Cause: Infections
Photos: Before
During
After



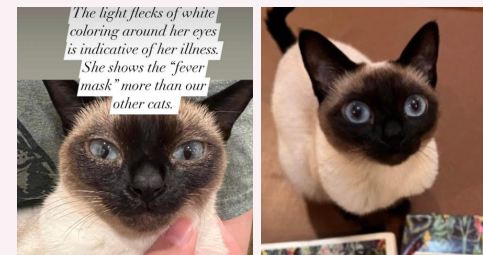
Another set of lilacs to show that fever masks are not exclusive to the browns/chocolate's despite being more common. These darlings owned by Kristin L James.

Both of these sweet Tonks actually suffered with a fever mask of different degrees. However both had a really rough time with various illnesses which would explain both of them displaying some form of fever mask.

Charlotte

Brown Point

Cause: Infections
Photos: During
After



This is sweet Charlotte owned by G. Cooper in North Carolina. Charlotte developed a fever mask last year.

'All my cats came down with herpes flare and mycobacterium infection after we went out of town for a few days and my neighbor cared for them. It was bizarre. They were all sick for a month.'

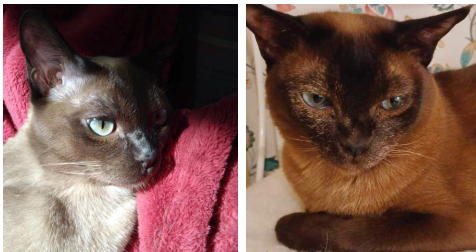
Thankfully Charlotte is glowing and glossy with no white at all as you can see from the after photo.

All photos credited by owners

Josie

Brown Mink

Cause: Virus
During

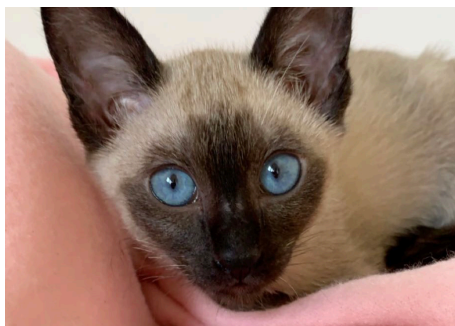


Josie, belonging to Rebecca Boyd in the US. She was suffering with a virus and this is her presentation.

ARMANI'S ASTHMA JOURNEY

“Armani suffered with undiagnosed Bronchial Pneumonia which sadly was picked up late despite the presentation of the fever mask. The photos show the clear progression of the fever mask, it’s a fascinating representation of how bad it can get.” Allegra Loch.

The Christmas of 2020, our gorgeous Armani (Boo Boo), a brown point Tonkinese was ready for her gotcha day! We travelled a 10-hour round trip to bring her home from the breeder who met us halfway on her journey from the country to the city. This day could not come soon enough as we waited to hold our baby girl in our arms, counting each day since she was born on October 1st 2020. Armani is the kitten who was going to heal our shattered hearts after losing her brother 1 litter above her, tragically at 13 weeks old in the June the same year.



12 weeks old - Kitten Armani just arrived displaying her gorgeous brown point mask

She didn't disappoint as she settled in very fast, demanding her human slaves and biological brother Louis Vuitton to love her, feed her, play, and sleep next to her, which we all did willingly. I remember looking at my little girl sleeping and checking on her to make sure she was breathing, stemmed from having PTSD after losing Calvin Klein earlier

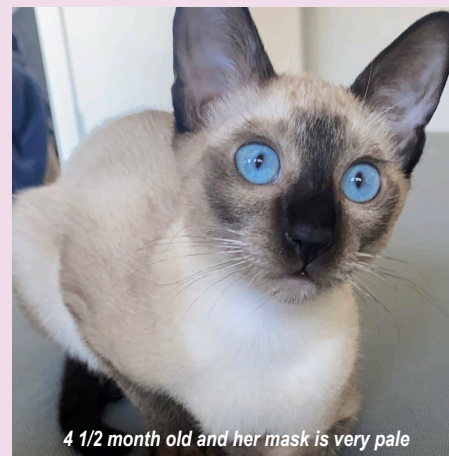
that year. I often captured on my phone her daily activities and all the gorgeous things kittens get up to and **this one day at 14 weeks old**, I filmed her having her very first “cough” attack. I sent the video to my regular vet seeking his out of hours thoughts and he responded by saying that it looked like sneezing or that something irritated her and that he doubted anything serious but if it persisted, we should get her seen to.

Armani was due for her last vaccination soon after and I decided to wait it out to see him. However, that day could not come soon enough as I **then noticed something very unusual with her mask** and it started to fade out. I reached out to 2 of Armani's furry godmother's who kindly alerted me to a thing called 'fever mask' which I had not heard of. *This was making sense to me because she was quite dark in her colour points and it literally started to bleach out.*

I emailed my vet to flag this for our pending visit and to note for a discussion. When it was time for her to have her last booster, she didn't seem to have a temperature and my vet



15 weeks: Mask is starting to fade under her eyes.

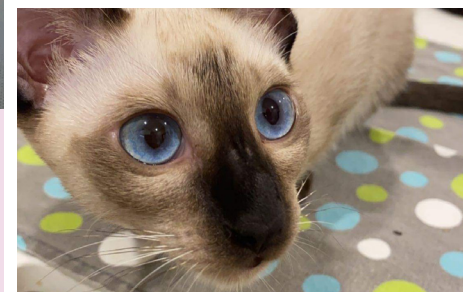


4 1/2 month old and her mask is very pale

(or breeder for that matter) had not heard of this occurring before. My vet said it wasn't anything to worry about and her coat is light because of the warmer weather! As most of us know, cats tend to hide any issues or illness and Boo Boo our little firecracker did not present any signs of being sick, eating 5 meals a day, playing, getting up to all sorts of normal kitten mischief. By the time Armani was just over 6 months old, she had several known coughing attacks and by this stage, I was starting to really be concerned. I no longer had trust in my usual vet and started to dig deep on why she was having these episodes so young. After seeing a post on a global Tonkinese community Facebook page alerting us to her boy who had several coughing episodes like that of Armani's, I reached out to the Sydney University Vet Hospital immediately to make an appointment, and I was fortunate to land one with the top feline specialist a few weeks later. She underwent several tests including X-rays, and blood work (incl. FIP) and the results were confirmed, **bronchial pneumonia and possible asthma**. She was treated with antibiotics for 2 weeks and if she still presented a cough, we were to repeat all the tests.

The good news was that Armani's lungs were clearing of the pneumonia, but she still presented signs of feline airway disease. At only 7 months old and too young, the specialist was against bronchial lavage procedure which is the one true source of diagnosing asthma.

Armani was prescribed an inhaler to be administered every day for the rest of her life.



I recall feeling somewhat relieved that she didn't have FIP, **that the high temperature led to her fading mask** and that I wasn't being over dramatic on her health issues. I was able to establish a partnering with the specialist who highlighted to me that it was great I brought her in. She was prescribed prednisolone (steroids) for a 2-week period until she was ready for the AeroKat spacer and being such an agile, lively and determined girl, I was in for a ride trying to train her. It took me 2 months before she was trusting enough and calmly took her breaths in without trying to escape.

Armani has only had a couple of asthma attacks after the diagnosis. However, she had 3 episodes in the 1 day and had to be rushed to the emergency vet. She was placed on oxygen to help stabilise her laboured breathing and following a 6 hour stay, she was sent home and placed on a small dose of the steroids for 2 weeks.

Armani has 250ml daily of the Flixotide at night just before bedtime. She has moments of resistance but since her hospitalisation, I have ensured a little tough love so she inhales the maximum breaths to give her little airway the chance to expand. I am so grateful to now have a new vet team and a specialist at the Uni Vet Hospital who understand the nature of asthma being very common in Siamese and help solve health matters as they arise.

She no longer wants treats after the inhaler and prefers the smoochiest kiss on her little nose. I am grateful to have a wonderful tribe of loving Tonkinese people, who have supported me through moments of learning about feline asthma and have shared their own experiences.



Armani has grown into a stunning young lady who is very dependent on me, more so than I could have imagined. I know Angel Calvin is watching over her as she plays in his green cardboard car and reminds me how far we have come.

Written by Donna Drakeford



1 year old - mask fully normal

Editor note:

The article was written in Autumn 2021 and I am happy to write that 3 year old Armani is doing very well - you can follow her and her siblings on Instagram:

@ tonkinese_designer_family



3 years old with her 2 brothers

Why is Jake getting a grey beard?

Written by: Ulla Korterman

I had never heard of Fever Mask until Summer 2022. Jake's face was looking very pale by then (spreading over a year) and I was getting concerned.

As you will read in his story I was aware of his dental and gum issues, but at no point on that journey was I told by my vet that it could be linked.

I asked Allegra if she had seen this before and she straight away pointed out that she thought it was a fever mask - and I had no clue! She explained to me that because his gums were possibly more inflamed and infected than we could see, the heat from this was changing his mask.

On the internet there is very little information on this topic and it also seems to me that not all vets are aware of this phenomenon in Colour Pointed Cats.

I want to thank Allegra for having this knowledge in her bag and for helping spreading this topic.

PS: as I am writing this I recall that Jake was also a case study in our last Tonkinews re. arthritis. I can assure you he is doing very well on his Solensia injections and his gums are much better now that all teeth are out. 2 very common issues with Tonks as they get older.



August 2022

August 2023 (now)

A quick recap: Jake had been suffering from gingivitis and been through a couple of dental operations to remove some teeth in 2020 and 2021 hoping that would be enough to beat the gingivitis!

However, in May 2022 his final back molar and 3 last teeth had to come out leaving him with just his 4 fangs and small front teeth. In hindsight all teeth should have been removed in 2021, because the fever mask was obviously a sign that entire year that he was more bothered by gingivitis than my vet & I thought.

The area around Jake's jaw had been turning progressively paler over a year. In July 2022 a month after his final & 3rd dental operation, the area around his jaw was now getting significantly paler and spreading upwards, which alerted me as this was a very unusual discolouration and I was sure it meant something. Until that moment, because I had asked my vet previously, I hadn't connected the dots up.

As mentioned, Allegra suggested that Jake perhaps had some residual infection lingering deeper in his gums. His gum was still very red especially where the last back molar had been removed, but other areas had healed ok. Most vets don't give antibiotics after dental surgery, but I went back to my vet and talked about my concerns. This time I showed pictures of how his mask had changed over 12 months. My vet agreed reluctantly to give Jake a month long course of antibiotics (via injection called Convenia - delivers 2 weeks of treatment - he had this twice). She wanted to give it more time and a course of Metacam. It helped for sure as his gums started to heal and looked much better - and his mask began to grow darker fur during the winter and a year later is now looking super again.