

Moluccan cockatoo

Cacatua moluccensis Indonesia

Also known as Salmon crested cockatoo

Moluccans are large pinkish-white cockatoos with recumbent crests. The crest feathers conform to shape of the head, lying down unless the crest is raised. The body color ranges from pale pinkish white to pinkish salmon color. The crest feathers are a darker salmon color.

Moluccan cockatoos are found on the islands of Seram, Ambon and adjacent islands in Maluku province of Indonesia. They inhabit lowland forests, especially mature canopy forests along rivers. They are most active in early morning and late afternoon. Wild cockatoos feed on nuts, including young coconuts, seeds, berries, fruits and insects.

Length is 18 to 22 inches. Weight is 600 to 850 grams. Males are generally larger than females, however in some isolated populations, possibly on out islands of Seram, large females can be found which may be larger than males.

Moluccans and other cockatoo species can be very long lived and a few individuals in zoos have lived up to 50-60 years. Precise data on life span of the average moluccan cockatoo is poorly documented. Birds often succumb to disease or injury and don't live their potential lifespan. Breeding age can be as young as 3 years, however hand-reared birds may not begin breeding before they are 8 to 10 years old, especially hand-fed, imprinted males. Breeding life span is not precisely known but is possibly up to 30+ years.

Personality - Moluccan cockatoos are affectionate and highly intelligent birds. They are excellent companion birds for those who want a charming, loving bird that likes to cuddle. Moluccans tend to be very demanding of attention and if they are deprived of attention can become very noisy and destructive or turn to plucking or self-mutilation behavior. Imprinted cockatoos may become possessive of their owners. This possessive behavior can lead to unpredictable or aggressive behavior towards other people especially as the bird reaches sexual maturity. Mature birds may scream more intensely and loudly (calling for a mate) and screaming is often intensified during the breeding season.

While moluccans will occasionally speak, they are not known for their ability to mimic. They are however very vocal and many birds loose their home due to loud screaming. This behavior is often learned when young birds hear the morning or afternoon screaming of another cockatoo.

Activities – Moluccan cockatoos are playful and inquisitive and they love to chew objects in their surroundings. They should always be provided with toys, blocks of wood or branches that they can chew. In order to ensure safety companion cockatoos should not be allowed unsupervised freedom in the home as they often encounter toxins or dangerous items. Young cockatoos should be socialized to many people and exposed to a variety of situations such as new cages, toys, visits to the veterinarian, handling by friends, wing and nail clips, etc. to avoid fear of novel situations.

Dietary needs - Cockatoos should be fed a formulated (pelleted or extruded diet) as a basis for good nutrition. Kaytee Exact is an excellent choice for their staple diet. Feed approximately ¼ to 1/3 cup daily. The diet should be supplemented with ¼ cup fresh fruits and vegetables daily to add variety and psychological enrichment. If the bird eats all of it's food, give additional food as desired. Overfeeding leads to pickiness, and wastage and throwing of food. Treats such as seeds, nuts and table foods maybe given in small amounts especially as rewards for good behavior.

Special requirements - Moluccan cockatoos are very efficient in utilization of calories. If overfed they may become obese especially when handrearing. Juvenile cockatoos are notoriously picky eaters and don't seem to need much food to maintain themselves. Try to ensure that the food that they do

eat is nutritious. Vitamin supplements are not needed for birds that are eating a formulated diet.

Grooming - Routine bathing or showering is vital to maintaining good plumage and skin condition. Birds can be misted and allowed to dry in a warm room or in the sun, or gently dried with a blow drier. Care should be taken not to clip the wing feathers excessively as cockatoos often fall and injure themselves. Clip only the primary flight feathers and only enough so the bird will glide to the floor.

Identification - All companion and breeding birds should be individually identified to assist in recovery if lost and assist in maintenance of medical and genealogical records. Many breeders apply closed legs bands when chicks are young. While they present a slight risk of entrapment closed bands are preferable to no identification, especially for breeding birds. Microchips, which can be implanted into the muscle or under the skin, are a reliable means of identification but require electronic readers to verify identification. Tattoos may be used but often fade or become illegible with time. Foot prints may have some application in identification.

Sexing Most of the pink and white cockatoo species can be sexed by eye color when mature. The eyes of the female are red while the eyes of the male are dark brown or black. In moluccan cockatoos however the difference in eye color between males and females is not distinct. The dark brown to black eye color of the male can only be differentiated from the reddish brown eye color of the female with a bright light or in direct sunlight. Young birds of both sexes have brown eyes. For moluccans, especially young birds, sexing by DNA may be required. The sex and breeding condition of breeders should be confirmed preferably by endoscopy.

Housing - Moluccan cockatoos are very active and should be provided the largest cage that space and budget allows. Durable cage construction is very important because moluccans are very strong chewers and can easily break welds on poorly constructed cages. Many are also adept at opening cage latches. Locks or escape proof latches may be necessary on cages. The cage should be as large as possible but must allow at least enough room to fully spread the wings. Ideally the bird will have an outdoor cage as well to allow play time in the fresh-air and sunlight.

Breeding – Moluccan cockatoos breed well in captivity and are bred commonly in the United States. In North America Moluccan cockatoos breed predominantly in the winter and spring. Some pairs may produce year round. Clutch size is typically 1 to 3 eggs.

The breeding cage should be large enough to allow some limited flight between perches. One inch by one inch by 12 gauge welded wire is a good choice for cage construction. A suggested size is 5 feet wide by 5 feet tall by 8 feet long suspended 4 feet above the ground or floor.

Nest Box - Double entrance boxes are often used to reduce the chance of the male trapping the female in the box. Large grand-father style wooden boxes can be used. Size should be approximately 18" x 18" x 24". Metal barrels, plastic pickle barrels and garbage cans can be used, however the act of chewing a wooden nest box may stimulate reproductive behavior.

Incubation period is approximately 24-26 days. Chicks will usually fledge at approximately 12 to 14 weeks of age. Moluccan cockatoos are relatively easy to hand-rear. Most handrearing formulas can be used successfully, however if you are using a formula which is relatively high in fat, care must be taken not to overfeed the chick. Kaytee Exact regular handrearing diet is a good choice.

Aggression

Male cockatoos frequently become aggressive toward their mates. Fatal attacks may occur in which the male bird severely bites the face, wings, and legs of the female. Cage construction and management must take into consideration techniques to reduce mate aggression. Clipping the wings of the male prior to the breeding season will help the female to escape in case the male becomes aggressive. Aggressive behavior may occur in compatible breeding pairs.

When breeding cockatoos, noise and proximity to neighbors must be considered. If housed outdoors cockatoos often call at night especially during a full moon. In southern states outdoor caging must be protected

from opossums to prevent exposure to the parasite *Sarcocystis falcatula* which can result in a fatal lung infection.

Common diseases and disorders

- Psittacine Beak and Feather Disease (Common in wild population but is now rare in captive cockatoo populations)
- Proventricular Dilation Disease
- Feather-picking
- Self mutilation
- Juvenile chewing of flight feathers and tail
- Poor eating habits - picky eaters
- Obesity, Fatty Liver Disease (baby birds which are overfed)
- Bacterial and fungal infections
- Sarcocystis
- Cloacal prolapse
- Mate aggression
- Toxicity, ingestion of metals
- Chlamydia infections (psittacosis or parrot fever)

Conservation Status - Moluccan cockatoos are listed on Appendix I on the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species. Their wild population is declining due to habitat destruction and trade. They cannot be sold in international trade without import and export permits.