

Slender-billed cockatoo

<i>Cacatua tenuirostris tenuirostris</i>	South-eastern Australia
<i>Cacatua t. pastinator</i>	Western Australia

Also known as the long-billed corella,(Eastern long-billed corella and western long-billed corella).

Slender-billed cockatoos are large white cockatoos, known for their slender elongated upper beak. They have short white recumbent crests. The eye rings are blue and extend below the eye revealing a blue bulge below the eye as in the bare-eyed cockatoo. There is a small pink patch between the eyes and nares. The nominate subspecies has a pink band across the upper breast just below the neck. The western subspecies (considered a full species, *C pastinator* by many authors) is distinguished by the lack of the breast band. The underside of the flight feathers are slightly yellow and the under tail is yellow.

Slender-billed cockatoos are common and found in large flocks throughout much of northern and central Australia. They inhabit riverine woodlands and eucalyptus forests near grasslands and agricultural areas. They also invade cultivated areas and damage crops. In the non-breeding season they may gather in large flocks of 2000 or more birds and range widely through grasslands in search for food. They feed in trees and on the ground and use the elongated bill as a plough, digging in the soil for roots, bulbs and insects. They also feed on seeds, crops, fruits, berries, buds, flowers and nuts and insect larvae. They are most active in early morning and late afternoon.

Length is 15.5 to 18 inches. Weight is 600-900 grams. Males are generally larger than females and have larger heads and beaks.

Slender-billed cockatoos can live up to 50 years. Precise data on life span of the average Slender-billed cockatoo is poorly documented. Many succumb to disease or injury rather than living for their potential lifespan.

Slender-billed cockatoos breed readily in captivity. Breeding age can be as young as 3 years but is more typically 4-5 years. Breeding life span is not precisely known.

Personality - Slender-billed cockatoos are intelligent, inquisitive birds and largely underrated. They are often passed over due to their relative homely appearance for the more beautiful moluccan or umbrella but in general have exceptional personalities. They are gentle, playful and affectionate and make very good pets. Slender-billed cockatoos are better mimics than most cockatoos. They are not so loud or demanding as the more popular cockatoos.

Activities – Slender-billed cockatoos are inquisitive and love to chew objects in their surroundings and are very destructive. 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. They need to have some space for exercise.

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. The diet should be supplemented with fresh fruits and vegetables daily to add variety and psychological enrichment. Feed approximately 1/3 cup of Pretty Bird and 1/3 cup of fresh fruits and vegetables daily. Monitor food intake. Overfeeding leads to pickiness, selective feeding and wasteful throwing of food. Slenderbilled cockatoos are predisposed to obesity.

Special requirements - Adult and juvenile slender-billed cockatoos are efficient in utilization of calories and are picky eaters. Slender-billed cockatoos have a tendency towards obesity. Try to ensure that the food that they eat is nutritious and avoid feeding large quantities of high fat seeds such as sunflower and safflower. 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 leg 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 Slender-billed cockatoos can often be sexed by eye color when mature but the eye color is not reliable. The eyes of a mature female are red while the eyes of the male are dark brown or black. Juveniles of both sexes will have brown eyes. Sex of breeders should be confirmed by surgical sexing or DNA sexing.

Housing - Slender-billed cockatoos are very active and should be provided the largest cage that space and budget allows. Ideally the cage should provide room for flight. Durable cage construction is not as critical as for other large cockatoos as Slender-billeds are not such strong chewers. Many are 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 – Slender-billed cockatoos can be difficult to breed in captivity. In North America Slender-billed cockatoos breed predominantly in the winter and spring. Clutch size is typically 2 to 3 eggs. One inch by one inch 12 gauge welded wire is a good choice for cage construction. A suggested size is 4 feet wide by 4 feet tall by 6 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. Grand-father style wooden boxes can be used and goffins tend to like a deep, narrow nest. Size should be approximately 12" x 12" x 24" or 12" x 12" x 36" or deeper.

Incubation period is approximately 24-26 days. Chicks will usually fledge at approximately 10 to 12 weeks of age. Slender-billed cockatoos are relatively easy to hand-rear. Most hand rearing formulas can be used successfully. Pretty Bird 19/8 or 19/12 hand rearing formula is a good choice.

Aggression

Male cockatoos frequently become aggressive toward their mates. Cage construction and management should 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.

Slender-billed cockatoos are not as noisy as the larger cockatoos however 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 the wild population but now rare in captive cockatoos)
- Proventricular dilation disease
- Feather-picking
- Obesity, fatty liver syndrome
- Lipomas (fatty tumors)
- Poor eating habits
- Bacterial and fungal infections
- Sarcocystis
- Mate aggression
- Toxicity, ingestion of metals

- Chlamydophilia (Chlamydia) infections (psittacosis or parrot fever)

Conservation Status - Slender-billed cockatoos are listed on Appendix II on the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species but only because of the listing of almost all parrots. Their population is large and stable and they are often killed as crop pests. Australia does not allow exports of native wildlife. Slender-billed cockatoos are relatively uncommon in the United States.