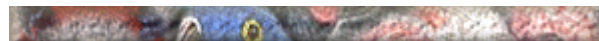




Dr. Susan Clubb, DVM, has written profiles on several species. In these profiles you will find information on where each species originates from, Scientific Names, Description of each species, Behavior/Aviculture, Diet, Breeding information, and Common Diseases And Disorders.

Happy Learning



~ Cockatiels ~

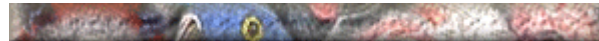
Charming cockatiels with their bright sweet dispositions, soft voices and graceful elegant appearance make ideal pets for people of all ages. Cockatiels have been domesticated for over 100 Years and have been carefully selected over many generations for qualities which make them exceptional companion animals.

Cockatiels can be taught to speak in a soft squeaky voice but their main vocal talent is whistling. They quickly learn to mimic tunes. Males especially have a pleasant courtship song which they sing while doing a shuffling dance to win the love of their chosen hen.

They are playful and very interactive but not hyperactive. They enjoy playing with toys, chattering, and whistling. They are readily

available worldwide and usually modestly priced although some color mutations may be quite expensive.

When buying a cockatiel make sure you buy a young bird. Hand-fed cockatiels are widely available but may be difficult to identify by the novice. They will have dark, almost black eyes but the eye color of normal adults is dark brown also. In young birds, sexes will resemble females but the orange cheek patch will be less prominent and they are typically a little smaller.



Appearance

The wild type or normal grey cockatiel is a sleek elegant bird. Cockatiels have an erect stately posture, erect crest which is raised even higher when alert, and a long tapered tail giving them a very attractive silhouette. They are a soft powdery grey with a soft upcurving crest and long tapered tail. They show sexual dimorphism (the adult male and female can be distinguished by color). Both sexes have a round orange ear patch. The male also has a large bright yellow cheek patch which is edged in white. This patch covers his face and extends up into his crest. Both sexes also have a obvious white wing bar which is also visible in flight. The beak is grey and the eyes are brown.

Immature birds resemble adult females but have black eyes. Females and juveniles have white to yellow bars across the primary flight feathers and lateral tail feathers. In mature males these feathers are solid dark grey. Young males start showing mature coloration when they moult into their adult plumage at 9-12 months.

Cockatiels will occasionally live to 20+ years but the typical life span is around 15 years.

Numerous color varieties have been established and many birds exhibit a combination of these mutations. For example you may see a bird sold as a cinnamon, pied, pearl, white face - four mutations in one. The most common mutations are:

Lutino - a mostly white bird with a bright yellow cast. This mutation retains the orange cheek patch of the wild grey type and has black eyes. Lutinos often have an inherited bald spot. They are also more

**prone to night freight and fatty liver syndrome than normals.
Inheritance is sex linked.**

Albino - A true albino is totally white and has red eyes. These birds tend to be less hardy than grey cockatiels. In order to keep the offspring strong, albinos should not be bred together but rather should be bred to splits.

Cinnamon - The body color is a soft cinnamon color, otherwise the bird is colored like a grey. A similar mutation called fallow is a lighter beige color and they have red eyes.

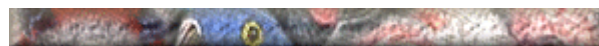
White face - This mutation has lost the yellow and orange coloration on the face as well as the yellowish cast to the body feathers.

Pied - Pied cockatiels have lost pigmentation in blotches scattered around the body. If these blotches result in the wing and tail feathers being depigmented, the birds cannot be visually sexed.

Pearl - The covert feathers of the wings will each have a spot which makes the bird appear to be spotted. Both sexes will be spotted as juveniles but males will resemble normal greys after they molt into their adult plumage.

While they are often thought of as miniature cockatoos, cockatiels are actually the only representative of a distinct genus (a monotypic genus). Their scientific name is *Nymphicus hollandicus*. They range widely throughout Australia and are commonly found in large flocks, mostly in arid and semi-arid areas. They are nomadic and seasonal following rains and the availability of food in flocks of up to 1000 birds. They feed primarily on grass and tree seeds and occasionally are crop pests. They often congregate with flocks of budgerigars especially around water holes. The world population of cockatiels is estimated at over 1,000,000.

Cockatiels are an ideal size for a companion bird -11-12 inches long. They vary in weight from 90-120 grams. Obesity is not common but occurs more frequently in very yellow lutinos and heavy peds.



Grooming

Routine grooming, trimming wings and nails will allow you to

interact with your bird without the fear of escape. Wing clipping is essential for initial training of the cockatiel and will need periodic renewal as the flight feathers are regrown. Many people keep their bird full flighted and a flying budgie in the home can be delightful. If you do choose to keep your bird flighted however there are safety concerns. Accidents are often associated with ceiling fans, birds falling into open toilets, swimming pools, pots on the stove, etc. Escapes can also happen very quickly when a door is suddenly opened and the bird becomes startled and flies out.

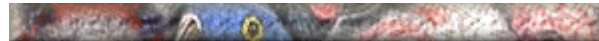
Cockatiels are very skilled and efficient fliers and need to have more feather clipped than heavier bodied birds. Clip all the primary feathers (outside 10 flight feathers) and 2-3 secondary flight feathers (10 flight feathers closest to the body) depending on the weight of the bird. Do not clip the inner secondary feathers (feathers closest to the body). For best results both wings should be clipped evenly. The goal is to allow the bird to glide to the floor without injury if he jumps or becomes startled and tries to fly. Clipping only one wing makes the bird unbalance if he jumps from his perch and may result in injury due to falling.

Cockatiels have special feathers, called powder down, on their flanks. These feathers produce a powder which cleans the feathers as a dust bath. This dust may be a problem for people with allergies. Frequent bathing will help to control feather dust. Cockatiels enjoy baths and will often bathe in a bowl on the floor of the cage. This bowl can be filled with luke warm water and allow the bird to enter as he chooses. Cockatiels can also be bathed by misting with a fine mist spray bottle but they will be reluctant to accept this if applied aggressively. Initially try misting very softly so the mist falls on them from above. Warm tap water is best. If commercial bird baths are used, wash between with fresh water to prevent build-up on the feathers. They should be bathed twice weekly to maintain excellent plumage.

Nails should be kept an appropriate length, as overgrown nails can be a hazard as well. They can be clipped with fingernail clippers watching for the quick (vein) inside the nail. Most cockatiels nails are white and the vein can be seen easily. The nail should be clipped a little bit past the vein. In case a nail bleeds after it is cut, you can stop the bleeding by application of quick stop. If no such product is available you can stick the nail into a bar of soap, apply flour or

cornstarch or you can light a match, blow it out and cauterize the nail on the hot head of the match. Because of their small size control of bleeding is important.

Cockatiels are often identified by a leg band by the breeder. These bands often show the hatch year and code of the breeder. They may also indicate the family of the bird. If well fitted they represent negligible risk but may help you to retrieve your bird if it is lost or for medical or genealogical records.



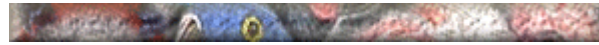
Diet and feeding

Wild cockatiels eat primarily seeds and forage on the ground. They have a relatively low need for water. Cockatiels can live on a seed diet alone but will eventually develop nutritional deficiencies, especially if breeding. Oddly cockatiels seem to be very sensitive to mineral levels in the diet and susceptible to kidney disease. Feeding of a pelleted diet alone to cockatiels often results in kidney problems as the bird ages. In order to overcome these long term dietary difficulties the best way to feed cockatiels is to mix a pelleted food made for cockatiels, half and half, with a good clean cockatiels seed mix which is relatively low in sunflower. Pretty Bird manufactures a special cockatiel pellet which takes these problems into consideration.

Cockatiels are reluctant to accept new foods and will accept few fruits and vegetables. They do tend to enjoy whole wheat bread, grates carrots, boiled eggs and shredded greens and these items are an excellent supplement for breeding birds. Care must be taken about hygiene as cockatiels are especially susceptible to yeast infections (*Candida* sp.) especially if eating soft foods which remain too long in the cage. They will often eat apples and love broccoli, however broccoli should not be fed daily because of its oxalic acid content which can also lead to kidney and calcium metabolism problems.

Grit should NOT be offered. Vitamins and minerals should be supplemented if the bird is eating more than 50% of the diet as seed. Preferably vitamins/ mineral supplements should be added to soft foods rather than given in the water. Vitamins usually have added sweeteners to improve their taste. The combination of vitamins and sweeteners in water enhance bacterial growth. If you do add vitamins

to water be sure to wash the water bowl well daily.



Housing

Cockatiels are small but they are very active and should be given plenty of room to move around their cage. They should have at least 2 perches far enough apart to jump or fly between. Cage size should be at least 20-24 inches square. If bars are horizontal they can more readily climb around the cage.

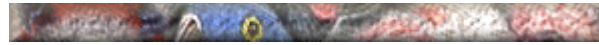
The floor of the cage should ideally be lined with paper, newspaper or craft paper. Sheets of paper cut to the size of the cage floor make daily paper changing easy. Make it a habit to look at the stools of your bird every day when changing the paper. This is an excellent way to monitor its health. If you cockatiel is eating seeds the feces should look dark green with a smaller white spot on top. If he is eating pellets the feces will be slightly more bulky and may contain colors from the pellets, which pass harmlessly through the digestive tract. Some colors may also show up in the urates. If you feed greens of vegetables they can also make the stools more bulky and liquid.

Stop feeding these food and the feces should return to the more typical appearance.

The cage should be placed so it is not directly below an air conditioning vent, or in a direct sunlight fro a window, but should be in an area of the home where there is much activity. Cockatiels are very social and like to be the center of attention. If you keep your cockatiel in the kitchen, always be aware of the dangers of Teflon poisoning, cleaning chemicals, oven cleaners. (Teflon poisoning occurs when a Teflon pot or pan is overheated, not during normal cooking temperatures).

The cage should have at least 2 perches. Natural branches make ideal perches as well as chewing material. Don't use sandpaper perch covers as the are very abrasive on the feet. Concrete perches however can be used to keep the ends of the nails blunt, but should not be the birds only perch. Place one perch near the food and water to allow easy access. A small rope perch is also fun. Toys should be supplied to keep the cockatiel busy and he should be introduced to a variety of toys at a young age so he is not frightened of them. They also like toys that they can enter like little snuggle companions, paper bags, boxes,

etc.



Breeding

The normal grey type and most color mutations are dimorphic and can be sexed visually but heavy pied cockatiels will need to be surgically or DNA sexed.

Cockatiels can breed when 1 ½ years old. They will breed almost year round but should be made to rest so they do not become exhausted. If they are bred outdoors they should rest in the summer because the chicks don't tolerate heat well and will have health problems, especially the weaker mutations.

The breeding cage for a pair can be 2 feet by 2 feet by 3 feet long with a nest box hung on the outside. The nest box should be approximately 8 inches x 8 inches by 10 inches tall and should have approximately 2 inches of pine shaving as bedding. The hen will lay 3 - 8 eggs but usually 4-5. Incubation period is 21 days. She usually starts to sit after laying the second egg which is a large clutch can result in large size difference between the oldest and youngest chicks. Incubation is 21 days.

Provide plenty of food for the pair to feed their young, especially whole wheat bread, grated carrots, egg food and some fresh greens.

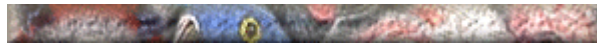
Both parents share in caring for the young and they are ready to fledge (emerge from the box) when they are 6 weeks old.

If you have several pairs you can reduce the burden on a single hen by moving eggs or chicks between nests. It is best to have a hen raise only 4 chicks. Chicks fledge at 4-5 weeks and if allowed will stay with the parents for another month. When hand-fed chicks wean at 6-7 weeks.

Babies are clumsy and should not be allowed to fly free initially as they can be easily injured in their clumsy flight attempts. Young cockatiels are very susceptible to concussions due to clumsy early flight attempts. They also have tiny hooks on the ends of their nails which easily become entangled or caught on cage wire. Ideally these should be clipped prior to fledging.

If you choose to hand-feed your chicks it's best to leave them with the

parents until they are about 3 weeks old. At that age they can be fed 3-4 times daily. They can be fed Pretty bird 19/12 or Kaytee macaw hand rearing formulas. Cockatiels tend to grow better with the higher fat formulas. They should be fed 10% of their body weight each feeding. They will wean easily if they have good weight going into the weaning stage. Offer them spray millet, seed mixes, small pieces of apples and corn and cockatiel pellets.



Diseases

Psittacosis or Parrot Fever - Caused by the bacteria *Chlamydia psittaci*, this disease can be transmitted to people and it is very common in cockatiels. New or ill birds should be tested, especially if going into the home of elderly people.

Liver disease - Probably associated most often with poor nutrition, however can also be associated with many disease processes.

Polyoma virus - First described as "budgie fledgling disease" this virus causes death of many parrots chicks as they emerge from the nest. It is not really common in cockatiels.

Psittacine Beak and Feather Disease - causes poor formation of flight and tail feathers. Birds with abnormal feathers should be tested.

Protozoal infections -*Hexamita*, *trichomonas* and *giardia* are common protozoal infections, especially in breeding colonies of cockatiels

Bacterial infections - A number of common bacteria can be problematic in cockatiels especially if their nutrition and hygiene is not good and they are stressed by excess heat. Sick birds should be cultured. Enteritis is one of the most common bacterial problems seen in cockatiels.

Bordetella avium - This is a bacterial infection which can be carried by adult cockatiels without symptoms. When transmitted to their chicks it can result in sinusitis, pneumonia and lock-jaw. Suspect breeders should be cultured.

Yeast (*Candida albicans*) infections are very common in cockatiels and passed to their chicks which can be severely affected. White

patches can be seen in the crop (through the skin) and in the mouth.

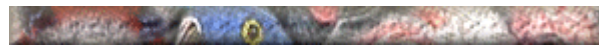
Again candida is more of a problem in hot weather or in birds treated with antibiotics. Internal parasites - Round worms can be a severe problem in breeding birds especially in birds which are housed in colonies in flight cages. Suspect birds should be tested or wormed.

Excessive egg laying - Cockatiels have been adapted to captivity and selected for high production for many generations. Some female kept as pets still produce large numbers of eggs and this can affect their health if not managed appropriately.

Calcium deficiency - Because of the large numbers of eggs produce by breeding cockatiels, calcium deficiency is common. This must be considered in feeding programs for breeding cockatiels.

Traumatic accidents and accidental poisonings are common causes of death in cockatiels. Don't allow them un-supervised freedom in the home. Cockatiels are often killed by other family pets (cats & dogs).

Ideally your cockatiel should have a yearly examination by a veterinarian to help it live to it's potential. Cockatiels can live up to 20 years with good nutrition and care.



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