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COCKATIELS

Cockatiels are medium-sized, trim birds that are native to Australia. They are one of the most popular companion birds. They adapt well to captivity and are easily bred housed as pairs in colonies. Although color mutations are highly valued by some aviculturists, the inbreeding required to produce unusual colors has actually resulted in some negative genetic disorders, including decreased disease resistance, reduced life span and hatching defects. The lutino or white cockatiel is probably the most afflicted, with balding on the head, a nervous disposition and other abnormalities. The "normal" grey cockatiel has the best chance for a relatively long healthy life. To get such a healthy bird means avoiding the bird mill cockatiel sold in most chain pet stores. Contact a breeder with references. Vital Statistics
 Body length: 12.5 in
 Body weight: 75-100 g
 Age of sexual maturity: 6-12 mo
 Average life span: 4-6 yr
 Maximum life span: 32 yr

What to Expect from Your Cockatiel

Cockatiels are relatively quiet, nondestructive, entertaining birds that are easy to care for. Because they are considered so gentle, they are excellent as companion birds for children. Even though they do not tend to bond with an individual person, they retain better companion bird qualities as a single bird rather than as a pair. However, several cockatiels may be successfully maintained in a single household with patience and attention to each individual. Cockatiels are limited talkers (males may be better), but some individuals are so good at whistling that their tunes are recognizable.

Is Your Cockatiel a Male or a Female?

Immature grey cockatiels have yellow stripes under the primary wing feathers. A male's stripes only go as far as the elbow and he loses these stripes around 9 months of age. Females' stripes go to the body attachment of the wing and never loses them. Head and facial markings are brighter on males. Color mutations (lutino, pied, pearl) may not exhibit the same gender differences in feather pattern. Vocalization is the earliest means of sexing cockatiels - the male has a melodious call; females have more of a monotonous chirp. Cockatiels are prolific year-round breeders. Their offspring are easy to hand-raise, but are reluctant to wean.

What Do Cockatiels Do All Day?

Cockatiels are playful and easily amused with simple toys. Because they (especially females) love to chew, toys must be free of toxic metals, hooks, sharp objects or small, easily consumed components. Providing small diameter, fresh-cut branches from nontoxic, pesticide-free trees is suggested for budgerigars. Check with your veterinarian for recommendations on locally available safe trees.

Are Cockatiels Tame?

Young, hand-raised cockatiels adapt readily to new surroundings and handling procedures. They should be exposed early in life to novel situations (car travel, hospital visits, multiple visitors in the household, other household pets) so that they are well adjusted to these events. Some behavior modification techniques may be necessary to prevent biting by wary adult cockatiels.

What Your Veterinarian Looks For in a Healthy Cockatiel

Dry, open nares Clear, bright eyes (no discharge) Smooth, bright feathers without color breaks, transparency or ragged edges Smooth beak Alert, erect posture Body free of lumps and bumps Even, reptilian pattern on the feet, and nails of appropriate length

How to Identify Your Bird

Two methods used to permanently mark companion birds for identification purposes are tattoos and microchips (both are injected under the skin). Individually numbered leg bands are unreliable for identification. However, every bird has a unique scale pattern on the feet. Photographs of the feet, which are updated as the bird ages, can be maintained in the bird's record to confirm its identity and to prevent fraud that can occur with other techniques. The facial features may also be unique.

Why The Wings Should Be Clipped

Cockatiels that are allowed unrestricted freedom in the home lose their tameness and can encounter numerous physical dangers or toxins; therefore, wing clipping is recommended. The goal of clipping the wings is NOT to make the bird incapable of flight, but to prevent it from developing rapid and sustained flight and to prevent escape. A cockatiel will require additional trimming 8-12 weeks after the start of a molt cycle.

How to Keep Your Cockatiel Healthy, Happy and Safe!

Give lots of attention. Feed a fresh, high quality, toxin-free formulated diet, such as Harrison's Fine Grind Formulas with daily supplementation of chopped vegetables and fruit according to instructions on the back of the bag. Do not feed grit, as it is not necessary with modern captive diets. Provide clean, fresh uncontaminated water. Remove and replace food and water containers twice daily to maximize activity in a healthy bird. Provide an occasional opportunity for bath, shower or misting (at least weekly). Avoid spraying house with insecticides.

Housing for your cockatiel should:

Housing for your cockatiel should: be as large as possible. be clean, secure, safe and easy to service. be constructed of durable, nontoxic material. contain variable-sized perches made of clean, nontoxic pesticide-free tree branches. have food and water containers placed at opposite ends of the

enclosure. avoid having perches located directly over food containers. offer occasional opportunity for protected outdoor exposure to fresh air, sunlight and exercise.

Cockatiels are very curious and will investigate anything new in their environment. That is why it is important to prevent their access to:

ceiling fans hot cooking oil Teflon®-coated items (overheated) leg chains sandpaper-covered perches tobacco and cigarette smoke chocolate, avocado, salt, alcohol toxic houseplants pesticides toxic fumes easily dismantled toys dogs, cats and young children cedar, redwood and pressure-treated wood shavings sources of lead or zinc plug-in air fresheners.

Most Common Diseases in Cockatiels

Obesity Obstetrical problems (egg-binding) Upper respiratory symptoms (sneezing) Eye problems (swollen, runny) Chlamydiosis Feather picking Yellow-colored feathers in lutinos Difficult breathing (gasping) Lead or zinc poisoning Intestinal parasites Injuries Incoordination (especially in lutinos) The most common disease conditions in cockatiels are often the result of malnutrition. Visiting your avian veterinarian for routine health checks will help prevent many of the above diseases and support you in having a long, satisfying relationship with your cockatiel.