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### COCKATOOS

Cockatoos are native to Australia, New Zealand and South Pacific islands. Most free-ranging species are considered threatened or endangered, and efforts to protect these birds have resulted in a ban on importation for pet purposes in the United States. High quality companion birds are available from breeders. The "white" species (eg, Umbrella, Sulphur-crested, Citron) are in high demand because they are such good quality companion birds. The personalities of cockatoos range from the "reserved" demeanor of the Moluccan to the comical and playful Corella. All are affectionate and highly intelligent birds that can be easily house-trained. Cockatoos produce abundant powderdown (powder from their feathers) that may cause human upper respiratory allergic reactions in some individuals. An ionizer or similar air-filtration unit may diminish the degree of circulating powderdown in a room. Vital Statistics Body length: 12-28 in Body weight: 300-1100 g Age of sexual maturity: Small = 1-2 yr Medium = 3-4 yr Large = 5-6 yr Average life span: 6-10 yr Maximum life span: 80 yr

### What to Expect from Your Cockatoo

Cockatoos are appreciated as companion birds because they enjoy "cuddling." Cockatoos are like small children - they can be charming and may try to "steal the show." Care must be taken to avoid spoiling these birds. They require so much attention that they can be noisy and destructive if improperly socialized. Imprinted cockatoos may become excessively possessive of their owners, leading to aggression toward others, unpredictability and other vices such as feather picking. Because of these problems cockatoos are not recommended as a first bird or to people who spoil their pets. Cockatoos have some capacity to mimic but their voice is not as clear as other parrots.

### Is Your Cockatoo a Male or a Female?

In most white cockatoos species, the gender can be determined by the color of the iris: those of adult males are black and adult females are reddish brown. However, this does not hold completely true in all individuals; therefore, endoscopy or laboratory methods may be desired to confirm the gender in breeding facilities. Males are known to occasionally brutalize or kill

their mates, even in pairs that have been previously compatible.

### **What Do Cockatoos Do All Day?**

Most cockatoos are playful and easily amused with simple toys. Because they love to chew, any toys must be free of toxic metals, hooks, sharp objects or small, easily consumed components. Providing chew toys or fresh-cut branches from nontoxic, pesticide-free trees may prevent some cockatoos from destroying their perches as quickly. Check with your veterinarian for recommendations on locally available safe trees.

### **Are Cockatoos Tame?**

Young, hand-raised cockatoos 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. Discipline, leadership, patience, hooding (covering the head), a sense of ritual and the offering of rewards may be necessary to modify behavior problems relating to screaming in an effort to demand the presence of a family member.

### **What Your Veterinarian Looks For in a Healthy Cockatoo**

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 not reliable for identification. Every bird has a unique scale pattern on the feet. Photographs of the feet (updated periodically 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.

### **Why The Wings Should Be Clipped**

Cockatoos that are allowed unrestricted access in the home lose their pet qualities and can encounter numerous physical dangers or toxins, as well as cause significant damage from chewing; 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. Maintenance trimming is required eight to twelve weeks after the start of a molt.

### **How to Keep Your Cockatoo Healthy, Happy and Safe!**

Give LOTS of leadership training. Feed a fresh, high quality, toxin-free, formulated diet, such as Harrison's Course Grind Formulas with daily supplementation of chopped vegetables and fruit according to the instructions on the back of the bag. Grit is probably not necessary with modern captive diets. Provide clean, fresh uncontaminated water (try using water bottles). 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 cockatoo 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.

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

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 (metal items like bells and chains) Nylon or other synthetic rope or toys.

**Most Common Diseases in Cockatoos**

Feather picking, self mutilation Foot Baldness and sores Obesity Lipomas Psittacine beak and feather disease virus Metabolic bone disease (juveniles) Upper respiratory disease Anti-social behavior, esp. family member and mate aggression Fungal infections Liver disease Parasites Cloacal prolapse Many common disease conditions in cockatoos are the result of malnutrition. Visiting your avian veterinarian for routine health checks will help prevent many diseases and support you in having a long, satisfying relationship with your cockatoo.