Cockatiel Mutations

by Dale R. Thompson
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EDITOR’S NOTE: The following article on cockatiel mutations was originally published in the Aug/Sept '82 Watchbird. It proved to be one of our all-time most popular articles and the back issues have long been sold out completely. The full page photo of seven cockatiel mutations is unparalleled. It took Thompson and Dodge about eight hours of shooting to arrive at this masterpiece.

The cockatiel, Nymphicus hollandicus, is undoubtedly one of the most popular species among aviculturists. Next to the budgerigar, it is the most popular psittacine as a pet. It can be reproduced quite easily in just about any type of aviary. It is easy to sex (except for the pied) and when tame makes a very enchanting pet. One of the main reasons for its popularity among aviculturists is that several mutations have occurred in this species. There is a great fascination in acquiring two or more mutation colors on one bird. The following is a short description on each mutation.

PIED MUTATION: The pied was the first cockatiel mutation to occur in captivity. They first occurred in the aviaries of Mrs. R. Kersh and D. Putnam in 1949. I visited Mrs. Kersh in 1979 and she was still working with this mutation and, I might add, they were outstanding in color. The pied is recessive so, unlike the sex-linked mutation, the hen can be split to pied.

The pied mutation has a great variance in color markings. No two birds are alike. Good pieds are considered by aviculturists as birds that are mostly white with a few black spots on the head and neck. They are also considered by aviculturists as birds that are mostly white with a few black spots on the head and neck. They are also considered by aviculturists as birds that are mostly white with a few black spots on the head and neck.

When breeding pieds you may or may not get heavily pied young from heavily pied parents. Some of the best heavy pieds that we produce come from light pied parents. The only good way to obtain heavy pieds consistently is to work with a line of heavy pieds for several generations. Tony Barrett has done this to quite a degree and is
now one of the top breeders of this mutation.

Though most heavy pieds are still unevenly marked, some outstandingly marked birds do occur. One of the best is a bird completely clear except for two evenly marked grey patches on the back of each wing.

The pied birds cannot be sexed by visual markings as can the other mutations. Sexing must be done by behavior. Split pieds often show several white or yellow flecked feathers on the back of the neck.

CINNAMON MUTATION: The cinnamon is mentioned in the literature to have occurred around 1950 in New Zealand. The bird we have now originated in Belgium in the late '60s. When in Europe, the term Isabelle was used, and at first I thought this was a similar looking mutation, but this was the cinnamon using a different name. The cinnamon runs from a light phase to a dark shade than the hen. The melanin in the cinnamon is brown, not black, and gives the bird a tannish color. The different shades of color come from the amount of melanin produced.

An unusually marked cinnamon occurred that has splotches of color on its back and wings. On some the markings are scalloped and show quite a degree of shading. The term marbled is mentioned in the literature to refer to a dietary deficiency or that they occurred that has splotches of color on its back and wings. On some the markings are scalloped and show quite a degree of shading. The term marbled is mentioned in the literature to refer to a dietary deficiency or that they can be sexed by behavior. Split pieds often show several white or yellow flecked feathers on the back of the neck.

The lutino has red eyes and this can be seen in the nestlings before they open their eyes. This mutation started out as a weak strain but with outcrossing, this can be corrected. The lutino
Cockatiels. Top row (left to right): fallow, normal, cinnamon, lutino. Center is charcoal, and pied. Bottom is pearl. Photo by George Dodge and Dale Thompson.

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