

The Importance of Reading

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We are all told as children that reading enhances our life. I never came to find this more true than when I decided to purchase my first cockatiel. Always admiring the beauty of the cockatiel, I finally convinced my husband that I just had to have one so on our anniversary one year he led me to the pet store to choose which one I'd like.

Knowing nothing about cockatiels, I did know at least the basics of looking for a healthy bird. When I chose the most alert, attentive one there, the store clerk removed her from the cage and clipped her wings. I had never seen such a process before and was advised that this made it easier to train

them. With my new bird (who now had stubby wings) and a "How to . . ." book under my arm, we left the store.

The very first lesson I learned about cockatiels was that when they were upset . . . they *biss!* You could have imagined the look on my face when I first saw her do this. She also did a little rocking side to side to accompany this hissing noise. I had no idea what was wrong with her. I did get the impression that she definitely was trying to intimidate me. So for the first few lessons of trying to get her out of her cage I used a perch-stick. She found that less intimidating than my hand.

The second lesson I learned was

that even though her wings were clipped, she could still fly somewhat, not enough to gain height, but well enough for me to have to chase her. Her perch training had begun down a long hall with all the doors shut with no where for her to go except by me. She realized that every time she flew to the floor from her perch, I was going to retrieve her and place her on the perch again. After a few of these ill-fated attempts, she gave up. Every time she *did* sit still she got a treat of millet spray or some loving from me.

She learned to sit so well that my husband constructed a playpen for her to sit on during the day. This was kept on my coffee table in the middle of the living room and this suited her just fine. She loved to be where the action was. She ended up becoming a regular member of the family, more so than a pet. The playpen consisted of a wooden swing, a spiral step ladder and a tall balance beam. There were cups available for special treats. She turned out to be a very healthy, happy cockatiel.

She developed a bond with me, (I spent most of my time with her and trained and tamed her alone.) We had a little deal going between us. She loved to have her head scratched, and I loved being kissed. So it always cost her a kiss for a scratch. I think that's pretty fair.

A couple of years later, she began laying eggs. She did not have a mate, nor was there another bird in the house. This got to be quite a problem because she would lay egg, after egg, after egg. This is where the reading began. I had talked to several different people in pet stores, and it seemed the more people I talked to the more confused I became. It seemed that no two people had the same answer or advice. I figured I would get my hands on everything I could concerning cockatiels. I borrowed books from the library, I subscribed to different magazines, and I sent away for mail-order books. After reading all the material I could, I then could form my own opinion on what the right treatment would be for each situation. If I had only done that *first* before I had purchased my cockatiel, I probably could have done things better. Not that I didn't meet with the same results, I would have just gotten there faster.

I ended up purchasing a male for

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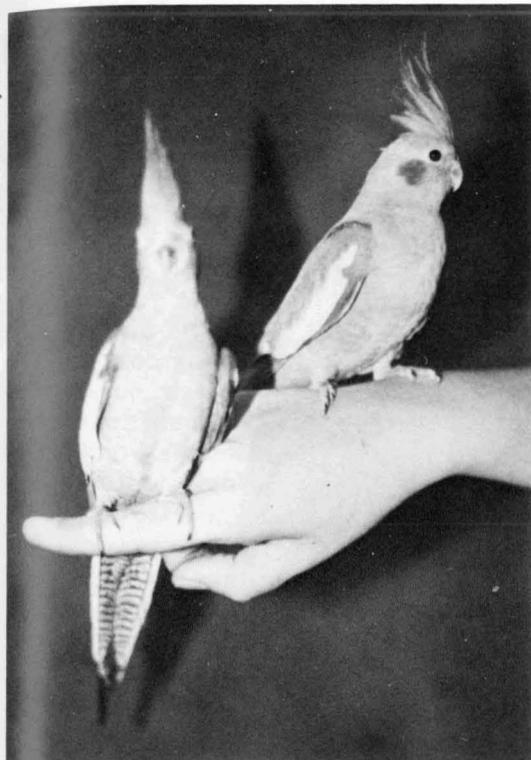
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Normal grey cockatiels at eight weeks of age. Sammi, female, at left and the male, Spanky, on the right.

her (she had since stopped laying eggs) and when she was four and the male was two, they began breeding. But this time I was ready for them! I read everything I could pertaining to the breeding of cockatiels. My husband constructed a breeding box for them which they began using within a couple of days from when it was put up. She ended up laying a clutch of six eggs. Unfortunately all were clear. She laid a second clutch of six eggs which were not fertile. I removed the breeding box to give the female a rest for a couple of months. To my surprise, they continued breeding in the cage without a box. She again laid a clutch of six eggs, and after candling them three were fertile and three were not. I let them continue their sitting right there in the corner of the cage. After approximately 19 days, the first chick hatched. The parents were very attentive in meeting this little one's needs. Much to my surprise, the next day, the second one hatched. Now Mom and Dad were busy feeding two tiny mouths.

The best part about this whole thing is not only did I get to witness the miracle of these two tiny 'tiels being born but the two parents were so comfortable with me that I could stand by and watch feedings. They never got nerv-

ous at the intrusion nor tried to scare me off so I had the pleasure of watching them grow by leaps and bounds. (The third fertile egg died in shell).

After approximately one and one half weeks, one morning I uncovered the cage only to find the second born lying flat with an empty crop. The first born was up being fed, and had a nice large crop. For some reason Mom and Dad did not feed one through the night.

Never having had the opportunity to do so before, I realized that I was going to have to handfeed this little one or she would die. Again, this is where I'm grateful that I had decided long ago to read all available material on 'tiels (whether I thought it useful or not). I mixed up a handfeeding formula that I had gotten out of one of the cockatiel books I had and immediately handfed her. I kept her in a tiny box with baby diapers in for softness and warmth and I also had a heating pad underneath it. I kept another cloth diaper draped over the top to retain some of the heat inside the box. She was warm and cozy. After feeding her for five days, she looked and was growing wonderfully. I just felt terrible at how lonely she must be. I would wrap her up every now and then and let her sit with me while I talked to her, rubbed her and kissed her. But I could not help think she should be with her family.

I cautiously placed the baby back in the cage with her parents and her brother. And again, as I mentioned I was never considered a threat to them so they did not become upset when I placed her back in the corner nesting area. I stood there and would not move until I could see what was going to happen. Fortunately the male is just as sound and secure as the female and Mom went right up to the little one I had just placed back into the cage and resumed feeding her and her brother as if nothing had ever happened.

Just when I thought all was well, when the little babies were three weeks old, I noticed both parents plucking out the feathers of the babies. Now I had read that as long as they were not doing any damage, they probably would stop. Not my two. It got to the point where they were being plucked constantly and to the point of a little bleeding. Sorry Mom, this is not acceptable, and off they

came with me.

I removed the babies to their own cage, kept them warm (they had most of their feathers and this was summertime) and resumed handfeeding. Only now I was an expert, right? I used two separate eyedroppers, one for each, and it was the funniest thing to see. I would alternate between them (one for this one, one for that one, one for this one, etc.). But if I ever made the mistake of giving two mouthfuls to the same bird, the other would grab the dropper and try to get it in his mouth. I swear he could count! He'd do it all the time.

Well, that was a year ago in April, and I am proud to say that I have two of the most beautiful normal gray cockatiel babies as you can tell from the story, one male (Spanky) and one female (Sammi) that anyone could ask for. They enjoy their days hanging out with Mom (Pretty) and Dad (Simon) on their various perches getting plenty of exercise, love, and some of their favorite treats. All four get along great, one big happy family, after all, isn't this the year of strong family values? I think I read that somewhere! ●

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