

# the Enjoyment of Breeding Cockatiels

by Janet Nichols, Harmony, CA

**T**he world of reproducing Cockatiels is many years old and with the new mutation additions within the past few years, it is even more exciting.

Being a hobby breeder does not mean that I cannot develop good cross mutations or large birds; in fact it enhances the chances for improving



meticulous records are kept on each bird. The most important thing for me is to develop good size and excellent conformation. Non-discriminate breeding only delays a good Cockatiel program.

## Nest Boxes

A 12 inch cube wooden nest box is hung on the front of each cage over the feeding station. The nesting material is made up of thick chunky pine shavings, which is good for chewing. These are much better than the fine curly type, as it packs much better in the bottom of the nest box and is similar to what would be found in the wild. The curly type has a habit of being fluffy and when there are large clutches of babies, the smaller ones tend to get lost in it. The parents often will not dig out the smallest or last baby to hatch because it is so buried in it. Besides, the curly type is often very dusty with fine particles of wood slivers that may get in the babies' eyes or mouth.

The common-walled Cockatiel cages I use are constructed so they are side by side with out a divider or solid partition. The cages form a long row with common auto misters, waterers and perches. Even though I have seen other breeders use double wire between the pairs, I see no problem using the single wire for 'tiels.

photo by Janet Nichols

any Cockatiel mutation or individual line of birds. This is because with an average of a dozen pairs of Cockatiels, I can spend the time that is needed to develop good birds. I can purchase very good stock from other great breeders or keep back the top birds from my own breeding stock.

## Aviary Building and Cages

I live in a temperate climate on the central coast of California and have avocado trees on the property. With avocado trees around, one knows that there will seldom be a hard freeze. My Cockatiel breeders can, therefore, be housed outdoors in an open-sided building with canvas tarps that snap down in case of heavy wind. This building has a covered roof.

Within the building cages are set up for individual pairs of birds. The Cockatiel cages measure 3 feet long by 18 inches wide and 2 feet high. I cage-breed my Cockatiels this way to control the breeding and reproduce the mutations I wish. All birds are banded and

## Feeding Station

The feeding station, comprised of a zerk feeder for grains and one combination sprout/veggie dish, is situated in front of the cage for easy access. The food station is built out (boot style) and under the nest box so no fecal matter can drop into the food. There is a pull-out feature for ease of serving. No perch is placed directly over these dishes. Either the front perch is hung just back of the food and water dishes or I place a natural perch at an angle where one end is fastened into the corner of the cage where the nest box is hung. The feed and water dishes are placed away from this corner. The parent bird can easily enter the nest box by walking along the perch to the corner, which is very close to the opening of the nest box. The automatic watering system and misters are located at the opposite ends of each cage.



*Whitefaced Cinnamon  
Pied male.*



### Diet

My diet is made up of a good grade of Cockatiel mix and whole grains to which is added additional canary, black sunflower and corn in the winter for carbohydrates. I believe in sprouted seeds and beans for Cockatiels so I use the best that I can find. The sprouting product I use is purchased from China Prairie (Fred Bauer) and is very fresh, clean and organic. To this I add seasonal vegetables. When there are babies in the nest, whole wheat grain bread is also added. A vitamin supplement ("Fresh Addition" from China Prairie) is added to all the soft food.

I supply cuttlebone and a mineral block to all the birds. There are times when the consumption of cuttlebone is enormous and I always make it and powdered calcium available.

### Breeding Season

I usually set my Cockatiels up in February and run them for three clutches. After the third clutch, pairs are turned out in large flights for rest and exercise. This is easily done when one removes the babies for handfeeding even though I do it later than most breeders do.

I break down the nest boxes around the end of October and allow the breeders and myself to have a period of rest. During the off-breeding season, culture tests are done where I feel they are needed and this is the time for cleanup and maintenance as none of the birds are on eggs or babies.

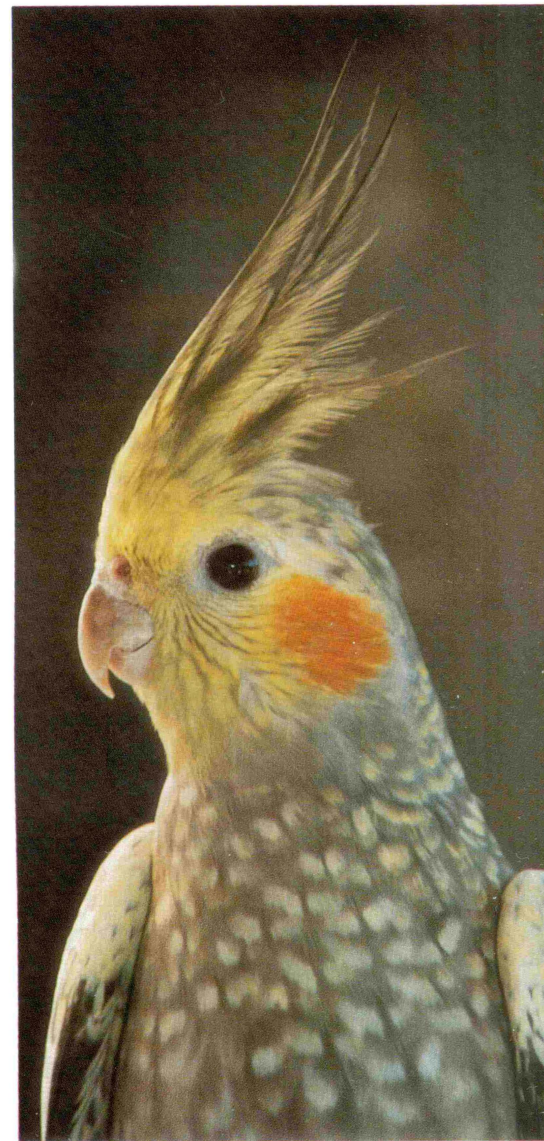
### Handfeed for Pets

I hand feed most of my Cockatiel babies as most of them will become pets when they are weaned. Those that are held back for breeding stock are also handfed (but not imprinted) as they make good breeders when they are well socialized with other Cockatiels during the hand feeding, weaning, and post weaning stage. All of the babies are handfed Exact hand feeding formula and they do very well on this diet.

I always leave the babies with the parents to the stage when they are about to fledge. I do this so I will not have to handfeed the very tiny babies as I have an outside job. It saves me time, takes stress off of me, parents tame the babies without a lot of my time, and it saves money on hand feeding too. I do, however, hand feed the youngsters a supplemental feeding while they are still in the nest – usually during the first early morning feeding of the day. This keeps them tame and gives the parents a break as I usually have large clutches of babies per nest. The babies are removed from the nest just before they fledge which is at about the 30-day mark. After doing this so often, I have gotten to know just the right age to pull them.

### Large Clutches

This may surprise many new Cockatiel breeders and maybe some seasoned oldtimers, too. I work to get the best breeding stock there is and my average number of babies ranges from six to eight per clutch. I work to



*Pearl female.*



photos by Janet Nichols

*Small hobbyists can breed all kinds of Cockatiel mutations including some of the newer ones such as the Yellowface Cinnamon Pied hen pictured above.*

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have good parenting stock where the adults will diligently feed the last tiny baby even when there are so many larger ones in the nest around it. I have had in the past an exceptional pair that would give me 10 babies per clutch and these were all their own babies – none fostered.

### Mating Combinations

There is a good reason for such good breeding stock. Not only do I hold back the best of the clutch but I also do very little recessive mating.

To illustrate this, for instance, I seldom mate a Whiteface-Heavy Pied to another Whiteface-Heavy Pied. Both the Whiteface and Pied mutations are recessive and this combination does not consistently give me the big birds I want or the large clutches.

Another mating I avoid is placing two red-eyed mutations together as mating an Albino cock with a Lutino hen would be. These red-eyed matings can increase the size of the baldness on the head that is so common, as well as loss of size and genetic soundness.

Even though I have excellent breeding stock, there are always failures. For instance, I have a Whiteface cock that is split to Yellow-face, Cinnamon and Lutino X with a Lutino-Pearl hen split Whiteface that will sometimes chew off the wings and feet of their own babies. I foster their eggs out to another pair, as I want the possible outcome of their offspring as many types of combinations show up. I have had two Cinnamon-Yellowface show up so far out of this pair and this is a beautiful combination of colors.

### Something for Everyone

My goal is to reproduce a good line of dark buttercup Lutino birds and Yellowface-Olive (Suffused Olive). Through line breeding for color and size, I hope to reproduce an excellent line of these birds. I am also working toward other color combinations and have a very splendid specimen of a Yellowface-Cinnamon-Pied bird.

Any breeder can follow their dreams with Cockatiels, as there are so many color combinations to choose from. Work to reproduce your favorite color and it will give you great enjoyment. 🐦



*Brother and sister – twins from the same egg.*

## Would You Believe Twins?

*by Elizabeth Clark, Oroville, CA*

**O**n 4 August 1998 a set of twin Sun Conures was born to Elizabeth Clark – not really. The parents were Sunny and Sara Sun Conure

This pair of conures lives in a cage three feet square by four feet high. their nest box is a small metal bootbox filled part way with a mix of pine and cedar shavings. They eat a seed diet with added vegetables including cabbage, carrots, celery, and broccoli. They also receive hardboiled eggs, Honey Nut Cheerios, apples, and oranges. Corn and assorted melons are added in season. All is sprinkled with spirulina and wheat grass.

Neighboring birds include Amazon parrots, Alexandrine Parakeets, Half

Moon conures and an occasional walk-by, look-in by an emu.

Because this pair disfigured their first baby while feeding it, I decided to be more careful with the following clutches and do all I could to safeguard their next offspring.

On July 1, 1998 their first egg was laid, followed two days later by a second egg. By July 15 both eggs were determined to be fertile and no additional eggs had been laid.

The first egg hatched on August second and the parents slightly disfigure the chick as they had done to the previous one. It now seemed more important than ever to safeguard the remaining egg.

When I checked the last egg on