

# Cockatoos are Lovers

by Jenni Jackson, Loxahatchee, FL

Cockatoos have become extremely popular as pets. They have a beauty that is unsurpassed; they quickly become members of any family; and many of them are good talkers. They have been kept as pets for hundreds of years, dating back to the days when the world was first being explored. Since then, the wild-caught cockatoos were found to adapt well to humans, and many thousands were imported into this country. Now that all baby cockatoos on the market are domestically bred and most are hand-fed, the pet quality of a cockatoo cannot be matched, in my opinion.

There are no two cockatoos alike. Just as in people, each has its own personality characteristics, making each one a unique companion. I have found in raising several generations of cockatoo babies that many of them exhibit characteristics that are unique to their parents and their grandparents. These babies all have individual traits, but the ones that they seem to have inherited from their parents and grandparents are so obvious that I don't even need to see their code number to know that it is the offspring of a particular pair.

There are some attributes which are common in all cockatoos. All cockatoos have a short tail, a crest, and a bald spot underneath the crest on top of their head. The bald spot, which is surrounded by a ridge of muscle, is rarely noticeable but has caused alarm in many a first-time cockatoo owner. The crest feathers grow from the ridge of muscle and this is the mechanism that allows the cockatoo to raise and lower its crest. Some crests have a forward curve which looks like fingers standing up or like a "Mohawk" haircut; some have a backward curve which looks like an Indian headdress; some crests are hardly obvious and rarely seen raised. Cockatoos can move their crests at will, and will do so for many reasons such as seeking attention, expression of hostility, interest, affection, and other emotions. Unless you know the cockatoo well, you cannot tell whether they are saying "go

away" or "come here and love me."

All cockatoos have powder in their feathers; some have more powder than others. The beak and feet of most cockatoos are shiny black, but usually appear gray because of the powder. Absence of this powder can be an indication of illness or disease. Cockatoos should never be bathed with prepared bird sprays that are oil-based, as the oil will cause problems with the powder-producing cells. Water is always best for bathing, as well as for keeping the powder under control and for making the molting process more comfortable for the bird when the pin feathers are coming through.

Cockatoos are quite "fuel efficient" and do not eat as much as many smaller species of birds do. They love having a variety of foods offered to them, but will consistently go back to their old favorites, such as sunflower seed, if given the opportunity. Providing a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables in the morning when they are hungry helps



Our friend, Michelle, with Umbrella, Casper,



Punkin lifts his foot and says "Hiieee" to everyone he meets.

to keep them eating healthy foods, and the rest of the diet can be added later in the day. Another of the cockatoo traits is the ability to hold their food in their foot. One of my favorite sights is that of my cockatoos all lined up, each munching on a fistful of sprouts, fruits, and veggies.

Cockatoos, by nature, like to chew. They have been known to destroy entire coconut plantations, and will not give a second thought to destroying furniture, window casings, books, or anything and everything with which their sweet beak comes in contact. Cockatoos must *never* be left unsupervised. We have a Moluccan who was left unsupervised by someone years ago, and she managed to survive chewing an electric cord, which "fried" most of her lower mandible.


A happy, healthy cockatoo is going to make some noise. Sunrise and sunset serenades are a normal way of life, and a rainstorm is another opportunity to vocalize. Some cockatoos have quieter serenades than others. Surprisingly, not all the larger cockatoos are loud, and not all the smaller ones are quiet. The Goffin's cockatoo, one of the smallest, can emit loud, piercing screams, while the Greater Sulfur-crested, one of the larger species, is very quiet.

Umbrellas and Moluccans, though the cuddliest of the larger species, are loud enough that no one in an apartment or townhouse should consider owning one. The quietest of the cockatoos that we raise is the Citron, which is small and is a good talker.

Cockatoos are not famous for their talking ability. I have been amazed to find that all my babies talk. Now as adults, many of the babies that I have raised and kept over the years talk so much and so clearly that they frequently are mistaken for people having a conversation. They seem to know not only what to say, but what inflection to put in their voice to get their point across. "Punkin," of course, is totally unusual in the way he enunciates his words by moving both mandibles when he speaks, and he speaks in complete sentences.

There are several other potential problems of cockatoo ownership. Some cockatoos are more "needy" than others, meaning that they require *lots* of attention. A cockatoo that gets constant attention and then suddenly gets none may become a problem bird. The result could be a plucking bird, a screaming bird, or a depressed bird. This can happen with any bird, but seems more common in cockatoos because they get so much cuddling and seem to crave it.

Cockatoos are considered "Old World" birds, as are Eclectus and the African parrots. "Old World" birds kept in warmer climates such as southern Florida, USA, tend to be susceptible to a terrible disease called sarcocystis, which is a parasite carried by opossums and spread by roaches. It is not contagious from bird to bird — only from roaches excreting opossum feces. Cockatoos do not show any signs that they are infected until 15 minutes before they die, when they become crippled. This occurs more in birds kept outside and on porches, but contaminated feed can come from anywhere.

There is no pet that is perfect in every way. However, the possible negative aspects of cockatoo ownership are far outweighed by the many positive aspects. I hope that everyone will have the pleasure of meeting a cockatoo at some time in their life. Only then, in my opinion, will they truly have lived and been loved. 

## ZOO BIRD PROFILES

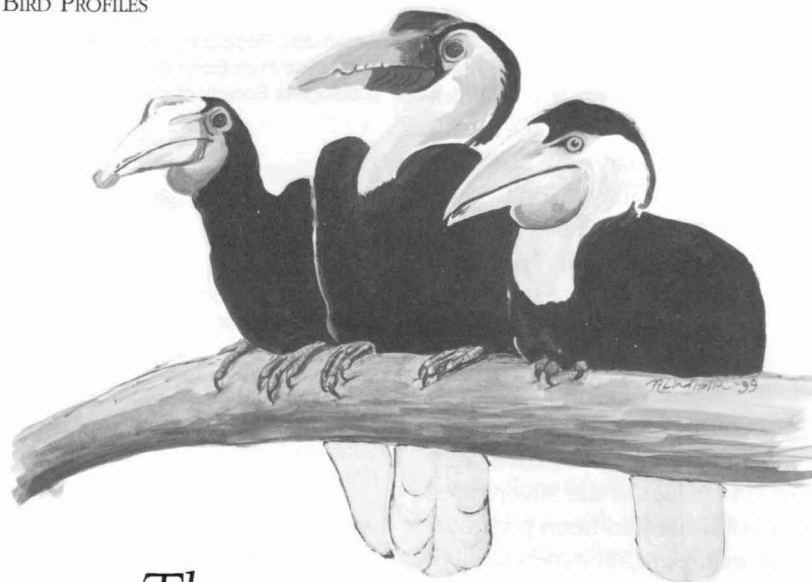


Illustration by Natalie Lindholm

# The Wrinkled Hornbill

*Aceros corrugatus*

Josef Lindholm, III  
Keeper/Birds  
Fort Worth Zoological Park\*

**I**n many ways, the world is a much smaller place than it once was, as far as zoo aviculturists are concerned. Curators in the 1960s had access to seemingly endless quantities of birds from India, Thailand, Angola, Mexico, Costa Rica, Ecuador, and other countries which now prohibit commercial export. Such species as quetzals, cocks-of-the-rock, umbrellabirds, bell-birds, mountain toucans, Rainbow Buntings, sylphs, sunangels, fishing owls, serpent eagles, and falconets, once widespread, are now seen in only one or two U.S. collections, or not at all.

On the other hand, there are many birds, undreamed of in American zoos in the 1960s and '70s now found in growing numbers of institutions. Some, such as the present assortment of fruit doves and bee-eaters are the results of improved understanding of husbandry. Politics has also played a role—the establishment of trade between the U.S. and the People's Republic of China has had a definite effect on zoo aviculture. Another factor has been an evolution within the foreign bird trade, an increased sophisti-

cation and broadening of scope among the dealers and collectors operating in the handful of countries yet allowing commercial export.

Nowhere has this been as apparent as in the Republic of Indonesia. During the 1960s and most of the 1970s, only a small fraction of that country's incomparably diverse avifauna appeared on the market. The riches of Irian Jaya were largely restricted to species from the West Papuan Islands — primarily cassowaries, crowned pigeons, and occasional birds of paradise, all now prohibited, as well as various lorries. Aside from lorikeets and cockatoos, practically nothing was seen from Sulawesi. And despite its close proximity to Java, the seat of Indonesian administrative offices, Sumatra was almost entirely unrepresented.

By the end of the 1980s things had changed dramatically. American Zoos held an array of taxa endemic to Mainland New Guinea and Sulawesi. Green-naped Pheasant Pigeons, Goldie's Lorikeets, Sulawesi Ground Doves, Red-knobbed Hornbills, King Mynahs, and Grosbeak Starlings can be