

# Goffin's Cockatoo

*Cacatua goffini*

by Sheldon Dingle, Alhambra, CA

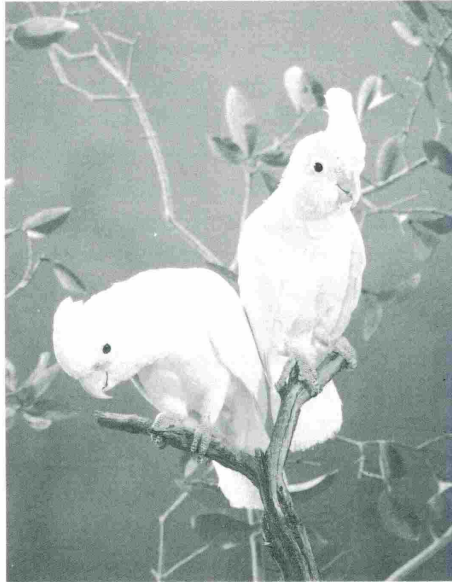
**T** **In the Wild**  
his wonderful little cockatoo is native to the Tanimbar and associated islands in the province of Maluku, Indonesia and is therefore usually called the Tanimbar Cockatoo by ornithologists and most of the scientific community. Those of us who are closely acquainted with the little clown of a parrot usually call it the "Goofus" cockatoo.

The Goofus...er...Goffin's is really smart. That may be why it is still has a relatively stable global population estimated to be 300,000 to 400,000 birds – despite the fact that over 52,000 birds were recorded in international trade between 1983 and 1989. Experts assumed that the heavy trapping combined with a very small range would surely put the species on the endangered lists. But they were surprised. A 1992 field census discovered the Goffin's in very high densities both in the forest and in the agricultural regions. The population was not endangered or even threatened. The cockatoos are a serious crop pest, though, and are therefore not liked or kept as pets by the local farmers. Indeed, the species is trapped and shipped out by the farmers who generally hold the attitude of "You eat my corn, I sell you into captivity. Howdya like that?"

## In Captivity

### As Pets

Prior to the wild bird conservation Act of 1992, these little white cockatoos were imported into the U.S.A. with regularity and easily purchased at any quarantine station. And the species has much to recommend it as a pet providing the negatives can be overcome or overlooked. On the upside, it is one of the smartest birds I have ever had the pleasure of raising from the egg. It will instinctively know everything you are thinking and remain one jump ahead of you in every way (I speak from personal experience and acknowledge that



brighter folks may fare better). The Goofus can be a loving and sweet pet that enjoys your company. It will actually play with you a bit like a puppy would. You may recall what the late James Murphy said about his pet Goffin's, "Domestic Goffin's Cockatoos can best be described as the moral equivalent of monkeys. Their great intelligence, charm, and perpetually curious nature makes them a one-bird entertainment center."

Well said. And Murphy suggested that some Goffin's can learn to talk quite well and in a high sweet voice. Not mine. I've had a couple of birds that learned a few words but they sounded like they had the croup and were chain-smokers – not really much for talking.

On the down side, a pet Goffin's Cockatoo is quite likely to scream (you know – the morning and evening routine) and it will eat your entire house if you allow it the freedom to do so. Little white buzz saws, the Goffin's – put the Tasmanian Devil to shame.

The above mentioned pet qualities of the Goffin's makes it a wonderful but challenging pet for a few of

the hardest. The wimps give up quickly and the Goffin's finds itself an aviary bird.

### As Aviary Birds

Folks have considered the Goffin's a fairly difficult bird to breed but I didn't know any better and had quite good luck with a number of pairs. I had the blessing of a flight pen measuring about 50 by 24 feet and about 10 feet high. I routinely tossed groups of new birds in there (after the appropriate quarantine of course) and let them work it out. Laziness on my part? Perhaps, but the birds worked it out better than I could – they generally chose the mates *they* liked rather than me choosing mates I *thought* might get along. In any event, I believe that pair bonding is the most important aspect of getting a pair to go to work so I tossed about a dozen Goffin's in the flight and they figured it out for themselves. Thus I bred and raised a lot of babies.

I put individual pairs into "California Breeding Cages" four feet square by eight feet long each with a shelter and nest box at one end. The cages were scattered among the trees where the birds could sometimes see one another and always hear each other. Some of the pairs raised their own babies and I pulled some for hand-rearing. I recommend the former.

They were fed the same fare as the other cockatoos, a seed mixture, soaked seed, greens, corn on the cob (a favorite – no wonder the Indonesian farmers hate Goffin's), some fruits and berries. Unlike several of the other species, there was no male aggression among the Goffin's, perhaps because I had a large number of birds and allowed them to choose their own mates.

I am very fond of Goffin's Cockatoos. They are delightful birds and a worthy addition to one's collection if one has the room and facilities to properly care for them. 