

New Cockatiel Mutations?

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Near the end of February 1982 we knew we had something strange. In a nest of five cockatiel fledglings there were two with subtle differences in appearance. One baby was an exceptionally bright yellow color and the other was a mixture of gray and yellow but with bright pink legs and an almost white beak. The remaining three birds turned out to be a lutino male, a gray male, and a gray female.

The first of these strange birds rapidly grew to become a gray-split cinnamon white and yellow pearly female. On her back each feather is fairly evenly divided between the colors gray, white, and yellow. Whereas "normal" pearlies have gray feathers with white or pale yellow edgings, ours has the the opposite. Her feathers are basically white and/or yellow with gray or black lacings and with black or gray storks.

She has normal cockatiel white wing flashes. Her primary flight feathers, however, are divided laterally with the outer part being black and the inner white. The underwing feathers are patterned in lines more than pearls with the

colors being a distinct cinnamon color with the outer half of each being either yellow-white or bright yellow. These light colors intensify toward the bird's head and diminish toward her tail. The tail feathers are basically unpatterned yellow but with black storks and a very delicate series of black lines irregularly transverseing some of them at about a 45 degree angle to their storks.

Her legs and feet are the pink/salmon color normally found on lutino birds but her toenails are jet black. Her beak is much like a lutino's but it shades into gray and ends with a black dot at the tip. For a female her face is exceptionally clean. The bright ear patches are surrounded by bright yellow. From a position between her nose and eyes are some very delicate, thin cinnamon-colored lines which run down her cheeks.

The pearled effect on her shoulders continues upward to the base of her crest feathers which are yellow but smudged with cinnamon. Strangely, this bird's eyes are of a medium density green/brown color.

Recently she completed her first molt

and the same patterns and coloration returned with no changes at all unless it is a slightly stronger yellow color.

The second unusual bird, two days younger, also turned out to be a female. Within a few days it was evident that something about her was different also. Her baby fluff and emerging pin feathers were a much more intense yellow color than that of her nest mates. Yet it wasn't until her first feathers fully formed that we knew how unique she really was.

This second bird is, basically, I suppose, a lutino. Yet, for many reasons, perhaps she's not. All of her back feathers are laced in yellow—a bright yellow at that. [The photos have an orange cast to them due to the type of processing Kodak used on Kodacolor film. The feather sent by the author had a very bright pure yellow color without a hint of orange on it. Ed.]

Each individual feather is white with a bright pure yellow edging all the way around it. The wing flashes, however, are pure white as found on all cockatiels.

The secondary flight feathers, likewise, are completely white but the five outermost primary flight feathers are really unusual. The body side of their storks are the normal white with the yellow "female" dots. The other side of each feather, however, is all yellow. Underneath her wings the mostly white feathers are barred with yellow. The pearliness of her back, though still maintained, turns to a yellow unicolor both on her head and around the base of the tail.

Her chest feathers are white edged with yellow but due to the size of the feathers and the edging, the white is not seen and her chest appears to be almost solid yellow. The tail feathers are 100% yellow.

This bird's legs, feet, toenails, beak and eyes are like those of an ordinary lutino cockatiel.

In her first molt she lost a bright orange band around the back of her neck—which is a pity. The band was an even orange color about two millimeters wide on a pure yellow background and stretched, unbroken, from wing base to wing base.

Both of these odd colored birds, like their mother, are large birds. Strangely, these three birds seem to have unusually large heads when measured from nose to back—disproportionately large even for large birds. They are also adept at picking up and holding objects in one foot as they nibble on them.

The parents of these two unique birds have an obscure genetic history. The mother was purchased in a little village

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Lutino pearly female.

in France and appeared to be an ordinary lutino hen. She was hatched in 1977. During the last two years some of her feathers have taken on a distinct yellow coloration in large patches and along her secondary flight feathers and on her back and chest.

The father, on the other hand, was acquired from Phil Ryan in Dallas, Texas. The bird was a normal gray verging on cinnamon and Dr. Ryan said it was split for pearly. It was hatched in 1981.

The male was purchased hastily to satisfy the hen's desire for a mate. She had laid several clutches of infertile eggs. The five babies, including the two unique ones, were the product of this pair's first clutch of eggs.

The pair has raised a second clutch of babies but with no spectacular results—a gray male, two lutino males, and one pearly female. The two lutinos, however, have their mother's yellow patches haphazardly on their chests and backs and their secondary flight feathers are quite yellow.

Now, of course, we have the challenge of trying to establish the colors and genetics of the two unique birds so they will breed true.



Lutino pearly female, right, cinnamon/gray pearly female, left.

We have contacted many cockatiel breeders, zoo curators, veterinarians, and other experts none of whom have seen any other cockatiels comparable in color and markings with our two young hens.

After much discussion with experts we obtained a cinnamon pearly male (which is also split for cinnamon-pied) to pair with our cinnamon/gray, white/yellow, pearly female. The male was hatched May 27, 1982.

And we have retained both of the lutino-spotted-in-yellow males from the second clutch, pairing the most intensely colored one with his sister of earlier hatching—our famous lutino pearly. We have been told that inbreeding this one generation shouldn't cause genetic deformities—and we hope that information is correct.

Predicting the results of any of these matings is impossible as the true genetic make up of the parent birds is unknown. Our two unique birds seem to be the result of a one-in-a-billion, hit-and-miss affair that brought together some unknown qualities in a most fortunate match. ●

Back view of the two unique birds. Lutino pearly, left, cinnamon/gray pearly, right.

