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by Sheldon Dingle
Los Angeles, California

COCKATIELS! Pets — Breeding — Showing

by Nancy A. Reed
published by TFH Publications, Inc.,
Neptune City, New Jersey, 1989

Years ago, so many that I've forgotten just when, I sipped coffee and chatted with Nancy Reed about the book she wanted to write on cockatiels. She was excited and enthusiastic about cockatiels and wanted to share those feelings and her knowledge with everyone alive. Of course, the whole world loves cockatiels and wants to know more.

Well, at long last, after all these years, Reed has done the job; she's written her book. And, I'm glad to say, the excitement and enthusiasm is still there and so, also, is Reed's off-beat sense of humor that I especially enjoyed in her conversation. In the book's introduction, Reed relates an incident wherein a person complained about the extremely noisy song of the Zebra Finch and wondered if a cockatiel might make a more peaceful pet. Reed recommended a pot of ivy. Well said. And there are other examples of her humor sprinkled like spice throughout the text, adding much to the flavor.

Indeed, the language of the book is one of its blessings. If you want pompous, lofty pronouncements drifting down from some avicultural mountain top, go elsewhere. Reed's writing, like her coffee klatch conversation, is direct, to the point, humorous and sincere. It is also extremely well informed and based upon first hand experience with cockatiels. You'll never get the feeling that

Reed's book is a well done library research paper.

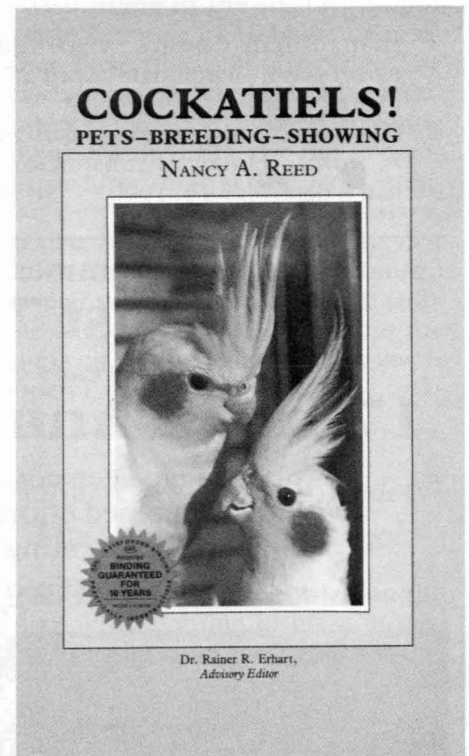
Although *Cockatiels* is subtitled *Pets, Breeding, Shows*, you actually get more than that. The introduction alone would almost suffice as a short but well done book on the cockatiel's various qualities, colors and specific behaviors. While touching on genetics and color mutations in the introduction, Reed said something that gave me a knee-jerk reaction. She said it is becoming difficult to find pure normal gray cockatiels. She would like to see a few breeders perpetuating pure stock so it isn't lost to aviculture. Sometimes I forget how we aviculturists strive to manipulate nature for our own reasons. Somebody, please, breed normals.

There are ten chapters following the introduction: cages, flights and equipment, diet, common ailments and diseases, pets, preparation for breeding, color mutations and breeding expectations, breeding, how-to's, showing, and The American Cockatiel Society Show Standard. Space doesn't permit a detailed analysis and report on each of the ten chapters but there are a few things that sort of floated to the top — based, I suppose, on my own experiences with cockatiels. In the first chapter, Reed mentioned night lights. Bless her heart. She figured out that cockatiels as a species are unstable. In short, certifiable wackos. Airhead is the word. Without a night light, some of your cockatiels will commit suicide. All of a sudden a whole flight full of cockatiels will rise in a panic and fly hard and fast for Australia. If they see the aviary wire in time, they'll reverse and head for Alaska. If they don't see the wire, they will crash and die. Please heed Reed's warning.

In the next chapter, Diet, one item stood out graphically because I've seen it abused so often. Reed says water is cheap, accessible and absolutely necessary to keep your birds alive. Keep their water so fresh and clean that you could sip it yourself.

We all know that rule but it can't be overstated. The rest of the chapter contains good advice and valid data but doesn't seem very important to me. I've had several birds eat just one or two kinds of seeds exclusively no matter how large a variety was available. And then there is my brother who has eaten almost nothing but peanut butter sandwiches for over 40 years and he's nearly normal. Oh well. Pay no mind to my peculiar attitude. Take Reed's dietary advice.

The chapter on Common Ailments and Diseases was written by two veterinarians well known in the bird



world, Dr. Richard E. Baer and Dr. Al Decoteau. They run through a short list of health problems that commonly occur in birds and, in layman's terms, point out the most effective home remedies. I was very glad to see that these two vets actually expect you to treat your bird at home. Too many vets advise expensive vet care for the simplest ailments. Perhaps for a beloved pet no expense is too great, but the true aviculturist who breeds numerous birds has to think like any old farm boy and keep costs to a minimum. The experienced animal breeder learns at what point professional veterinary care is necessary and he doesn't hesitate to use it. The information in this chapter will help you a lot with the majority of lesser problems.

In her chapter on Pets, Reed gives

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much good advice based upon experience and wisdom. She makes one statement, however, that I take issue with. She says, "I know of no one having any experience with cockatiels who can negate the virtues of cockies as pets." Nancy Reed, allow me to introduce my sister Kim Dingle. Years ago, I gave Kim a young, sweet cockatiel pet. A few months later, Kim returned the bird saying, "This little S.O.B. is so mean I could rob liquor stores with it." Perhaps my sister's cockatiel experience is not normal (nothing else about her is normal either) but cockatiels may not be for everybody as Reed seems to think. For the vast majority of pet lovers, however, cockatiels are quite suitable and Reed's advice is quite good. I especially agree with Reed's explanation of the two methods of taming, i.e. patience and force. Read this section carefully if you are tempted to try to tame a cockatiel. What she says works.

If you are interested in breeding and showing cockatiels, you will profit much from the chapter Color Mutations and Breeding Expectations written by Dr. Rainer Erhart. I've known Dr. Erhart for many years and consider him to be among the top two or three experts in this aspect of bird breeding. His chapter gives good, clear information on genetics, accepted terminology regarding color mutations and a good bit of avicultural history relating to color mutations. His table of expectations is quite complete and will give you your answers even if you haven't mastered Mendelian Formulas. Indeed, you cannot be considered an accomplished breeder without having a very good acquaintance with the material Dr. Erhart so clearly and thoroughly lays out for you here.

The Breeding chapter is very thorough in that it begins with conditioning and ends with weaning and covers everything between. The information is valid for a small bird-room operation or a many acre bird farm. The principles are the same. Reed also includes subjects not usually touched upon. For instance, she has subtitles of Fertility, Signs of Readiness, Bathing and Other Notes, and Weaning (wherein she honestly admits to being a little wimpy when it comes time to force the little guys to eat on their own).

A very interesting chapter for you practical folk who have a few birds and want to get into hands-on action

is How-to's. It starts with banding and gives you precise details and diagrams. Even a witling could band cockatiels if he could follow Reed's instructions. There is also an excellent section on handfeeding including a formula Reed approves of. The notes on sexing and shipping are quite good and contain much information that may clear up some mysteries for the novice.

Now, gentle readers, we reach a point in Reed's book that calls for a personal digression. Many, many years ago, I entered into a local bird show the world's most beautiful Chinese Ring-necked Pheasant. Even Jean Delacour loved it. As this was my first show, a good friend with much experience helped me catch my pheasant to transport to the show. In the process, he kneeled on the bird's long tail and managed to pull out every single feather. Let me tell you, dear friends, a pheasant with just his stubby butt bringing up the rear looks worse than a common chicken. With my bird too embarrassed to compete, my helpful friend's pheasant took the prize.

I've never been quick, folks, slow is the word for me, but I eventually figured out there may be more to showing than just judging the birds purely on their merit. To this day, I've not entered another bird in a show and am ignorant of the whole mystique surrounding bird shows. I thus disqualify myself from making meaningful comments on Reed's chapter on Showing and upon the American Cockatiel Society Show Standard. I do, however, have complete faith that Reed has treated these subjects with her ingrained professionalism and accuracy.

Something I do know about, though, is books. And I've just pulled several cockatiel books off my shelves — books with copyright dates ranging from 1963 to 1987. Believe me, friends, Reed's book is far and away the best. First off, it has 256 pages to the 159 pages of the nearest competitor and 104 excellent photographs to the competitor's 35. For a very thorough, detailed, serious treatment of the subject enlivened by a relaxed, casual style of writing sprinkled with humor, you can't beat Nancy Reed's book *Cockatiels! Pets - Breeding - Showing*. It should be available any day now and I suggest you purchase a copy immediately if you have the slightest interest in cockatiels. ●

Now Available: Newest Cockatiel Book! Cockatiels! Pet - Breeding - Show

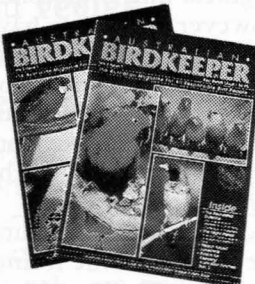
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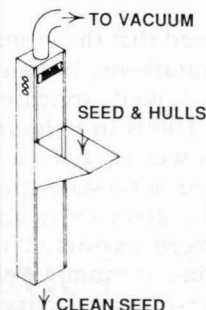
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