

Cockatiel Mutations in the United Kingdom

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The first reported cockatiel mutation bred in captivity was the pied which appeared in California in 1949. Since then, many more mutations have appeared, some of which have been established and others lost through misunderstanding or ill-fortune.

The majority of new mutations first appeared in the U.S.A. or Europe because there are many more cockatiel breeders in these areas and the movement of birds is not restricted.

Unfortunately for the United Kingdom breeders, importation restrictions are very costly and often very time consuming, not to mention the total destruction of a consignment at the slightest hint of possible infections. However, this does have benefits to the U.K. bird world in general as diseases are less likely to be introduced. When a mutation appears in the U.S. or Europe, it can take from five to ten years to find its way to the United Kingdom.

After the pied, the next color mutation to be developed was the lutino. These birds are totally devoid of melanin, resulting in beautiful white or yellow birds with deep yellow faces and orange cheek patches. The lutino first appeared in 1958 and again in the United States, but it did not reach the United Kingdom until 1968. These birds are sex-linked in their mode of inheritance and have been bred in considerable numbers. In the United Kingdom, they sell for approximately 15 pounds (\$30 U.S.). Lutinos are by far the most popular birds in the pet trade in the United Kingdom.

It has been reported that the cinnamon and pearl mutations, both of which are also sex-linked, appeared in the mid- to late 1960s in Belgium and Germany. However, I have a friend, Mr. R. Ballard, who states that pearls were in his collection in the late 1950s and were exported to Europe for vast sums of money. Perhaps the wrong person has received credit for producing the first pearls.

The four mutations already mentioned provided cockatiel breeders in the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s

with a lot of potentially new color combinations. They attempted to breed the first double and triple combinations. This resulted in an incredible interest in breeding cockatiels throughout the United Kingdom. However, in the early 1980s, there were no new exciting mutations freely available and cockatiels suffered a dramatic fall in popularity.

Fortunately, some hard core breeders stayed with cockatiels, endeavoring to improve size, color and quality of color, and color combinations. In 1979, Britain saw its first white-faced cockatiel. This bird was devoid of yellow pigment, resulting in a charcoal grey bird with a pure white face. This mutation was first produced in Europe in the early 1970s. White-faced cockatiels are recessive in their inheritance and, therefore, must carry a white-faced gene in both parents before visual offspring can be produced. These birds were not freely available in the United Kingdom until about 1984. The interest was back in cockatiels and they saw a great revival in the late 1980s. The potential to produce completely new looking birds was again fulfilled.

In 1984, I was fortunate enough to purchase a pair of visuals and a pair of split to white-faced cockatiels for the sum of 1,000 pounds. In 1985, I produced my first albino which is a combination of lutino and white-faced. Albinos are pure white. European breeders preceded me with this mutation by at least five years, as my friend Dale Thompson saw his first albino there in 1980.

At present in the United Kingdom, the most popular white-faced combination mutation is the pied-white-faced. These birds cost from 100 to 300 pounds each, depending on the quality and clearness. The clearer the bird, the higher the value.

All the mutations mentioned so far have been either sex-linked or recessive in nature. However, in 1979, Terry Cole (a United Kingdom aviculturist) discovered a very pale bird in a pet shop. He bought it and, over several years, proved this mutation, which he calls "silver," is dominant. These birds are almost metallic grey and, being dominant, only one parent needs to be silver to produce silver youngsters and either sex. When two silvers are paired together, 25% of their offspring will be double-factor silvers. These birds are twice as light as their parents and resemble a lutino with a grey wash.

So the cockatiel breeders of the

United Kingdom finally produced their own mutation, and it was dominant. Dominant silvers were soon combined with white-faced to produce birds called "platinums." Also the silver-cinnamon combination produces beautiful, pale cream colored birds.

In 1989, the first double-factor silver-white-faced was bred in the United Kingdom by my father-in-law, Don Pursehouse. This mutation is as near to an albino (not being a true albino) that has been bred so far. These birds are almost white with a grey wash. They have black feet, black eyes and black beaks. In the United Kingdom, at the moment they are selling for about 300 to 400 pounds.

Also in 1989, the discovery of a new mutation was made in another breeder's aviary. This gentleman was not interested in breeding the bird and was not sure of its origin. The bird was a normal grey cock which had quite a dark body. The face, instead of being bright yellow, was pale lemon, and the cheek patches, instead of being a deep orange, were a pale peach color. I paid 50 pounds for the bird and at the time of buying wasn't sure if I had a new mutation or not because I had previously owned a similar bird which molted out to normal coloration. However, this bird was an *adult* cock.

That year I paired the "pastel-faced," which I thought was a good name for it, to a white-faced hen. To my astonishment, they produced four white-faced and one pastel-faced offspring. The pastel-faced youngster was also a cock. Obviously, the original pastel-faced had to be split for white-faced and so was my new pastel-faced youngster.

In 1990, I paired the original pastel-faced to a normal hen, the results of which were all normal offspring. After one clutch, I re-paired the pastel-faced to a different white-faced hen. The pastel-faced youngster was also paired to a white-faced hen. Again, all offspring were white-faced or pastel-faced. This led me to the theory that pastel-faced is dominant to white-faced, but recessive to normal.

In 1991, I will re-pair the original pastel-faced to his pastel-faced granddaughter. This may, if my theory is right, produce a double factor resulting in no cheek patches. Only time will tell. I will also introduce the pastel-faced into other mutations with hopefully pleasant results. ●