

## PARROT INCUBATION PROCEDURES



BY  
**RICK JORDAN**



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### Parrot Incubation Procedures

by Rick Jordan

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# Understanding Cockatoo Personality

by Risa Teitler, Professional Trainer  
Miami Springs, Florida  
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A newly acquired cockatoo is an individual with a definite personality. The great majority of cockatoos are natural hams and respond well to your attempts to tame them. They are highly intelligent, inquisitive birds who appreciate a well-ordered life style. Most will thrive for many years in a stable environment, given proper diet and housing. Maladjusted, aggressive, frantic cockatoos are few and far between, although I have observed some who bordered on schizophrenia and others who engaged in self destructive behaviors that were hard to understand.

It is important for the prospective owner, as well as the long time owner of any cockatoo, to realize that these birds have complex emotional make-ups. Too often, the new cockatoo fancier is unprepared for the task of taming and properly caring for a wild caught, imported bird. Due to their multi-faceted personalities, the inexperienced bird handler should consider the purchase of any cockatoo species with careful deliberation. I do not recommend any type of cockatoo (whether imported or domestic hatched) as a "first" pet bird in a home where there is no previous experience with parrot husbandry. It is far better for the beginning bird fancier to gain real knowledge of how to care for and handle some of the less complicated parrot species before getting involved with a cockatoo.

Domestic hatched, hand-reared cockatoos are becoming more common in the United States and elsewhere, as captive breeding programs are instituted. However, the greatest number of cockatoos that find their way into private homes via the pet trade, are imported. The varieties most common in captivity include: the salmon crested or Moluccan cockatoo, the (medium) sulphur crested or Eleanora cockatoo and the umbrella or greater white crested cockatoo. There are several other species frequently kept as pets, including the

rosebreasted or galah, the Goffin's cockatoo, the citron crested, the (lesser) sulphur crested, the triton and the corella. Some of the more unusual species are most often seen in bird parks. These include the very exotic black palm, Banksian, gang-gang, Lead-beater's, greater sulphur crested, slender billed and red vented cockatoos.

All of the cockatoos I have lived with and trained were exceedingly noisy, demanding birds, regardless of species. The intellectual capacity of some individuals is truly amazing, while others seem unable to grasp the simplest idea. Speech potential in most cockatoos does not equal that of the macaws or Amazon parrots, but I have had some outstanding talkers among the galahs and salmon crested. My sulphur crested also acquired speech and has a very clear voice, but has a limited vocabulary.

Most important to the new cockatoo owner is correct information on the handling techniques of taming a wild, imported bird. Consumers who purchase hand raised babies do not encounter difficulties in taming, although some of these hand fed cockatoos develop behaviors that require a behavior modification program after a year or more. All cockatoo owners should make a real effort to learn as much about cockatoo personality as possible so they can deal effectively with undesirable behaviors, should they appear.

There is tremendous variation in the personality of cockatoos, both within a single species and from one species to another. Occasionally, I have brought home a bird from the importer, who was so docile, I considered it to be naturally tame. Others have been so nervous and distraught at being separated from the flock that they could not tolerate the most passive form of interaction: *eye contact*.

In taming several different species of cockatoos, I have discovered the age of a bird has less bearing on its ultimate tameness than its inherited personality traits. Most cockatoos

have a well established natural desire for physical contact. In many taming situations, I have capitalized on this and achieve close physical contact with the bird long before beginning arm taming. The affection cockatoos need from the human handler and demonstrate to the human handler, is one of the reasons cockatoos make wonderful, personal pets. However, this same need for affection translates into a craving for *attention* so a bird who has been an exceptional pet for a year or two may eventually try to dominate your life with its own need for frequent and immediate gratification. Herein lies the crux of cockatoo ownership: *if you cannot devote lots and lots of time to your pet every day, for many years, none of the cockatoos will be a suitable pet in your home.*

An affectionate bird who feels ignored or rejected by its owner will develop many different self stimulatory behaviors. Some common self stimulatory behaviors include constant screaming, feather plucking, dish dumping, constant destruction of the cage perches, cage bars and toys.

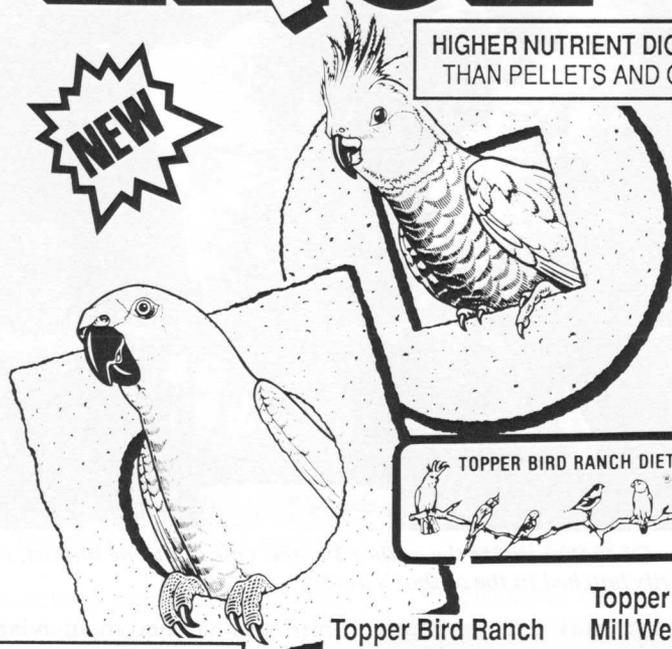
Any species of cockatoo may react strongly to changes in your appearance. A new pair of glasses may throw your tame pet into fits of rage. Many cockatoos become upset if you change your hairstyle or hair color. Be prepared for a real reaction if you come near the bird wearing a hat! Cockatoos seem to react to some colors more than others. For example, the color yellow gets my cockatoos very agitated. I have learned to avoid wearing yellow when taming wild cockatoos. The drastic response to colors is likely due to an inherited tendency that has developed over the eons.

This information about cockatoo behavior and personality is intended to assist the beginning trainer as he contemplates his first attempts at cockatoo taming. Likewise, the formulation of a taming program should

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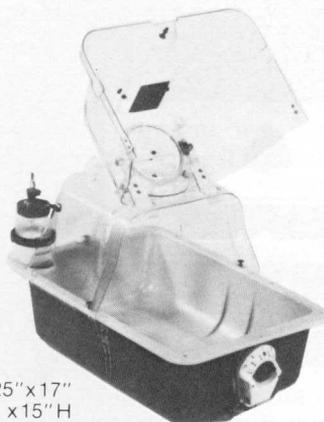
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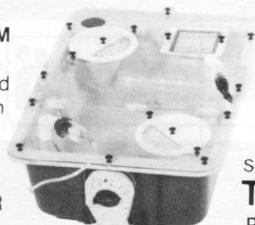


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*These Moluccan cockatoos share the author's home. One is a tame import, the other was domestically hatched in the author's aviary.*

emphasize gradual rather than marked, sudden change to achieve the most favorable results.

Judging the age of cockatoos can be difficult for the novice. Unless the

bird was hatched in an aviary and the hatch date documented, age cannot be determined absolutely. Some indications of youth in cockatoos are: smooth eye rings as opposed to thick,

wrinkled eye rings; feet and legs with smooth scales rather than lumpy, bumpy, rough scales; and "immature posturing." Immature posturing refers to a behavior that many baby cockatoos exhibit. It is defined by the bird pulling its head down into the shoulders and vocalizing a screechy, high pitched crying noise. Such behavior is a certain indication of youth. Very young cockatoos have shorter tails than their adult counterparts and the plumage is notably rougher and duller.

Life expectancy of cockatoos is quite long, some 50 years or more. Much depends upon genetic disposition and long term environment. The life span can be divided up into stages of development: infancy, childhood, young-adulthood, the start of reproductive maturity, active reproductive years, and old age. The geriatric cockatoo may suffer from gout, arthritis, heart trouble, fatty tumors, loss of pigment on the feet, cataracts and several other diseases of aging. As a result of the normally long life span, cockatoo personality is bound to develop some rigid habit patterns. A five to ten year old bird is still a very good candidate for taming. I have come to prefer the slightly older bird as a student because, in my experience, it tends to be less prone to cockatoo beak and feather disease.

#### Conclusions

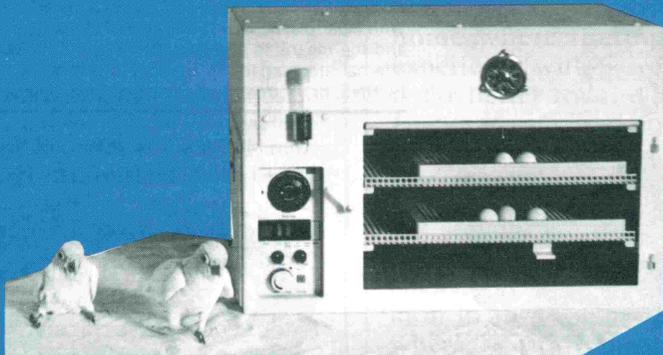
Cockatoo personality is largely determined by heredity. Observable personality traits have become rooted in cockatoo behaviors through a process of evolution and are almost unalterable. The taming techniques you employ will affect the bird's outward behavior, but have little effect on these rooted, genetically determined personality traits. Behaviors observed in several species of cockatoos that are considered to be inherited are: screaming at sunrise and sunset, foot stomping, body swaying, hissing, feather fluffing, holding out the wings with feathers fluffed, raising the crest feathers in alarm or in defensive posture and beak clattering.

Cockatoos are very diverse in personality. The basic elements of a proper training program are the same for all species, but the approach to taming must be adjusted to meet the needs of each individual student bird. Versatility on the part of the aspiring trainer will yield the most success in taming a wild, imported cockatoo. ●

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