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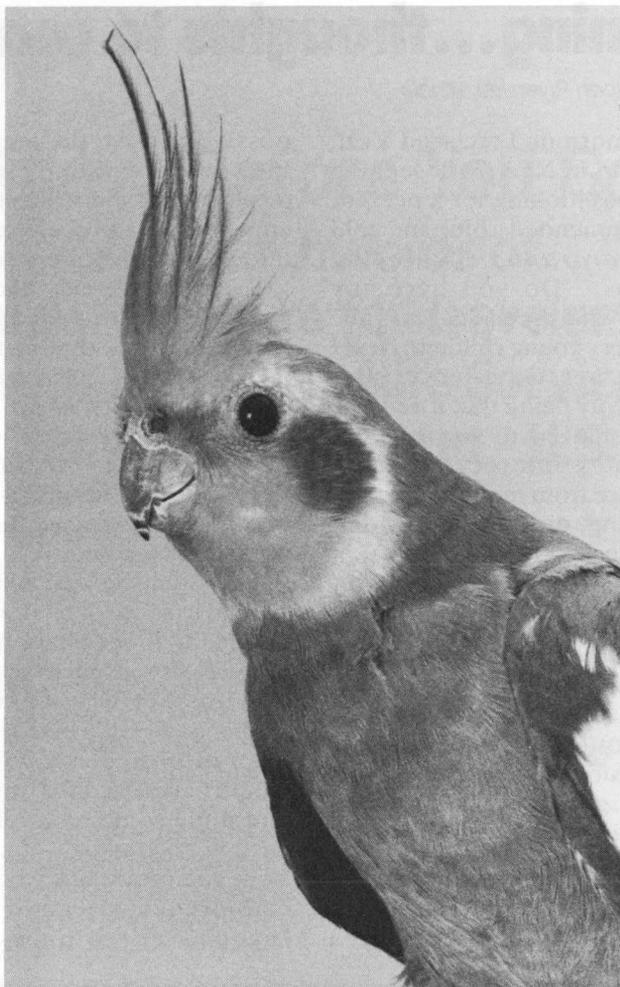
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Cockatiels

by Dale David DeWald
Silver Spring, Maryland

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Fast flying and long-lived, Australian cockatiels have become world-wide pet favorites. Almost every cockatiel sold in the United States has been raised in captivity, but the demand is so great that many of these fine birds are imported from breeders in other countries. Cockatiels are social birds that also require quiet times. They are easy to tame and will enjoy a few hours out of their cage with their master each day. In general they are not great talkers, but most can be taught a few simple whistles and many are very good talkers. If you do not train your pet as a companion animal, please procure a second bird to meet the social requirements of these avian delights.

These birds come in color varieties such as lutino (a yellowish white) as well as in their normal grey. Personal-

ities vary more by individual than by color; however, a mean cockatiel is very rare indeed. They can be obtained rather inexpensively from pet shops and private breeders. Cockatiels are so popular that two nationwide societies are dedicated to keeping, improving, and showing these birds: the National Cockatiel Society and the American Cockatiel Society.

Cage

The cage size should be large enough to allow each cockatiel to fully stretch its wings without having any feathers touch its cage. Square-type cages with horizontal non-toxic metal bars are best so that the parrot can climb about with ease. Other good cage features should include: a slide-out bottom tray that makes cleaning simple; two perches at

different heights and of different sizes such as 1" and 1/2" diameters; food and water cups that can be serviced from the outside of the cage; and, a door that opens widely enough for your hand with your bird on it to enter and exit easily. Fortunately, many cockatiel and small parrot cages are available now so that your job probably will be one of selection and not search!

Location

The cage and your cockatiel should be placed to *avoid*: drafts, much household (people, TV, phones, etc.) noise, rapid temperature changes, constantly low (below 55 °F) and constantly high (above 85 °F) temperatures, direct sunlight except for one or two hours per day, harassment from other animals, and toxic plants which could touch the cage.

Safety

When your pet is out of its cage take the same precautions as you would take with any other parrot and with the placement of its cage. Unless your abode is dedicated to birds, you probably should keep the flight, or primary, feathers of your cockatiel's wings clipped. Just two fully developed flight feathers and a window invite trouble. Cockatiels are very fast flyers.

Food

The American Federation of Aviculture and others currently are supporting research on bird, especially, cockatiel, nutrition. But, actual nutritional requirements are not completely known. Nevertheless, many pets have lived in excess of 20 years with a daily feeding of "cockatiel" mix and other seeds readily available at quality pet shops. Supplements that probably will help physically and psychologically include: dark green vegetables such as kale, collards and spinach; unsalted, shelled peanuts once or twice a month; corn on the cob; whole wheat bread; canary seed; and, a molting or breeding mix when appropriate. Yes, your pet will molt (lose feathers) at least once each year; and, partial or frequent molts are not uncommon. You may wish to try feeding fresh fruits such as banana, apple, orange, and grapes, but many cockatiels do not accept fruit. Spray millet is a good treat and is useful in training a cockatiel. Whatever is decided on by you and your pet, please be sure that the food is fresh and clean. Pellet-type food is becoming popular and may become a standard in years to come as it already has for small mammals such as rabbits.

Water

Change the drinking water every day.

In most places, room temperature tap water is fine, but, if in doubt, let it stand for a full day or boil and cool it first. Bath water can be a problem. If your cage is large, a pie plate type of cockatiel-sized bowl may prove beneficial. Bath fixtures that hang on the exterior of your cage usually will be accepted over time. And, of course, the shower from the bathroom sink's tap works well although you will use a zillion gallons of water by the time your pet finishes each bath.

Supplements

Gravel, sometimes called grit, should be available unless your pet is not feeling well. A beak conditioner such as a lava rock is advisable. Cuttlebone should be used until the bird's skin starts to dry. Vitamin and mineral supplements are important; these come in a variety of ways: already in pellet foods of some types, as a powder to sprinkle on the food, as a liquid or powder to add to the drinking water, or in a mineral block. Never exceed the recommended amounts, but definitely do not ignore the need to supplement your pet. And, do not forget the behavioral needs of your cockatiel. All parrots like to play and chew. Although cockatiels do not appear to be as active as many other parrots, at least provide a chew stick (balsa wood is readily available), and two other toys which you can rotate from time to time. On the other hand, cockatiels can become confused or injured by having too much junk in the cage at one time.

Illness or Accident

Identify an avian vet in your area before you need one! Purchase a bird care book that addresses this subject. Begin to worry if your cockatiel has a change in behavior such as sitting on the cage floor with puffed feathers for long periods of time. If you can do nothing else for your sick pet, gradually increase the heat and humidity (in a bathroom, for example) and be sure to feed and water your animal. Honey added to the drinking water often helps to supply an energy burst when your cockatiel really needs one. Prevention is the key. A *safe* and *clean* environment will pay off!

This introductory article cannot cover all aspects of cockatiel keeping. Because they are such popular pets, you should be able to find other articles in back issues of the *Watchbird* or various books about training, teaching cockatiels to talk, and breeding.

With proper care and lots of love, your pet cockatiel should provide years of entertainment and companionship. ●



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