

# Little Corella

(*Cacatua sanguinea*)

by John McGrath  
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People often ask me what does a Little Corella look like? The easiest way to describe to a lay person what a Little Corella looks like, is like a Galah, but white. Most people are familiar with the Galah, but on the other hand are not familiar with the Little Corella. The standard answer is usually a puzzled "Oh!"

The Little Corella is very similar to the Galah in size and shape, but with basically snow white, immaculate plumage. The birds have grey feet, a horn colored bill, and a blue periphthalmic eye ring. Most specimens carry a tinge of reddish-pink feathering between the bill and the eye. Sometimes this extends to below the eye. The white plumage is suffused with lemon-yellow. This can be observed when the wing and tail feathers are outstretched in the threat pose, or while the bird is in flight.

The Little Corella's voice could be a drawback to those attempting to hold this species in suburbia and remain appealing to the neighbors. It has a series of high pitched screeches and a waving wail which can be heard for many kilometers.

To accurately sex these birds, I suggest surgically sexing, a commonly performed operation these days. It should be performed by an avian veterinarian.

The Little Corella occurs over a vast area of mainland Australia, mainly the drier interior and to the northwest coast. They also occur in various subspecies to the islands to the north of Australia. There are also several subspecies on the mainland of Australia.

They can occur in massive flocks of literally thousands of birds, to sometimes a solitary pair. Man has cropped areas where the Little Corella is local and hence great conflict between man and bird occurs. When the birds attack this new found food source, it results in the death of thousands of birds per annum.

Little Corellas make very interesting pets either caged or at semi-freedom; hand reared examples are fine for this. They become proficient talkers and will even learn basic tricks. Little Corellas, like all cocka-

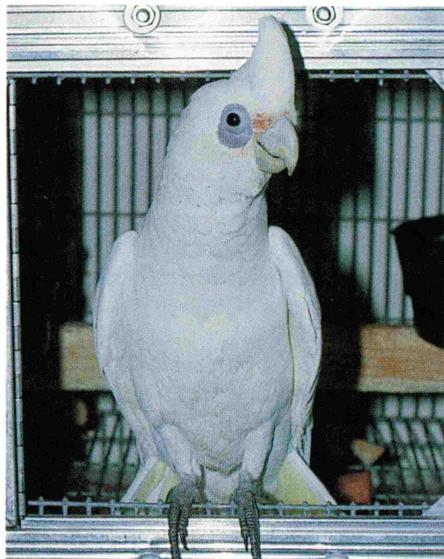


Photo by Dale R. Thompson/George D. Dodge

too species, are very intelligent parrots and therefore hand reared birds deserve extra treatment. Unfortunately because hand reared cocka-

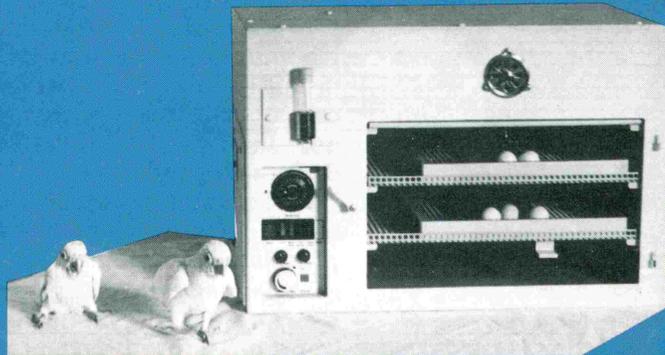
toos often become imprinted on humans, i.e. they think that you are they, even down to treating a particular human as their partners. So they long for your company and attention which they will reciprocate if offered.

Little Corellas make excellent aviary inhabitants. As long as they are provided with timber perches to chew, a well balanced diet and fresh water, you can expect a pair to breed for 20 to 30 years. Once your pair is bonded, they will spend hours mutually preening and become totally devoted to each other. The young pair should be introduced as early in age as possible, say at 12 months or younger if possible. I would think that Little Corellas would commence to breed at around five years of age and continue to reproduce for the period of time mentioned before. Most white cockatoos have a similar life span to humans.

A suitable aviary would be 1.2 meters wide, 2.1 meters high, and 6 meters long, with a suitable hardwood perch secured at either end, steel tube construction, a shelter provided at least 1.8 meters deep and roofed to at least the same depth.

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The walls could be completely covered in the same material as the shelter. The remainder of the roof should be covered with an opaque material. Mesh should be at least 3 to 4 mm in diameter, and 25mm by 25 mm square wire. A door could be provided, which could be the entire front of the enclosure.

A concrete floor is nearly essential to help cleaning of the aviary. It is also used to stop the Corellas from digging out and pests such as rats from digging in. The aviary should face north to northeast to take advantage of the morning sun.

Water can be provided in either an earthenware dish or an enamel dish with a capacity of 10 to 20 liters.

Seed could be supplied in a receptacle similar to an upside down garbage tin lid mounted clear of the ground. Seed can be supplied pre-mixed. Suitable grains include sunflower, oats, barley, plain canary, or French white millet.

Greens can be supplied on an easily constructed mesh shelf hung on the inside of the front door. This will help keep the fresh green food off the floor. Sprouted seed can be given in an easily cleaned, small tray inside the larger seed tray.

Greens are appreciated all year round and can consist of heads of seeding grasses, or just a handful of clover, and fruits and vegetables. This additional food is almost imperative when the birds have young in the nest. From my 1981 diary notes, I see I fed a lot of milk thistle, apple, pumpkin and even the aforementioned handful of clover.

Particularly when the Corellas have young, they need the extra vitamins and minerals supplied from soaked and sprouted seed. Nothing "flash" need be soaked, just the normal dry seed mixed and soaked in water for 24 hours and then rinsed twice daily to keep it from going sour. If you wanted that little extra, some of the legume family could be soaked, e.g. Lupins, Field Peas, Mung Beans, etc. The soaked, sprouted seed can be fed to the birds after 24 hours or several days. Sprouted seed can be stored in the refrigerator, with checks being made to make sure it remains fresh.

I have evidence to support the fact that Little Corellas, along with most cockatoos, are partially carnivorous. My pair would actually catch and devour mice and sparrows that found their way into the Corellas' flight. I had a friend in Sydney who fed earth-

worms to his pair.

You can also give your birds chop and chicken bones, or thawed, frozen mice or baby mice or rats. I am sure the birds would love this extra protein.

Grit and calcium supplements should be provided. For breeding Little Corellas, a log of approximate dimensions as follows could be supplied: 900 mm to 1000 mm deep with an internal diameter of 280 mm to 300 mm, and the end sealed off with a section of flat iron or similar. Fill this log to the top with rotten wood dirt, wood chips, soil, etc. Place it vertically on an old 12 gallon drum in the shelter of the aviary. Take care that your particular drum is not rusted out, allowing the log to fall through. The Corellas will clean out the dirt, etc. to suit their requirements. The log is placed on the drum so the aviculturist can monitor what is happening inside the log. You should be able to look down inside and reach the nesting chamber easily. Be careful the pair doesn't over excavate the log so you cannot reach the base.

By being able to see to the bottom of the hollow, you can see when the birds lay, young hatch, etc. You can reach, measure and weigh the eggs and chicks. This way if a problem develops you have the upper hand by knowing before it goes too far.

My particular pair has bred in both natural logs and the old 10 gallon milk drums that dairy farmers used to take their milk to market in. The nest receptacle was hung at an angle in the shelter. The milk drums were provided with a mesh ladder and wood dirt in the bottom corner. The drums had to be watched as they became hot in the warmer weather. I now used the latter nest log on the drum with good results.

In the last 10 years I've tended to become more scientific in my approach to aviculture.

I now measure eggs and monitor weight gains of young and record some for future breeding reference. Also, accurate weight measurements are essential for correct administration of particular worming formulas.

In 1981, I made reference to the change in shift of sitting of my pair of Corellas. Like all *Cacatua* subspecies, Little Corellas take turns at incubating the eggs. The cock incubates from about 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. (estimated time), the hen taking the night shift.

I was able to identify my pair from special individual features. The cock bird's crest was taller and narrower and was more tightly feathered; the hen being looser in feather around the head and body generally. If you take time to study your individual pair, you will observe these special features for yourself.

They laid three eggs and hatched three chicks which is not an uncommon clutch.

I held this pair in my aviary from 1968 until parting with them in the mid-1980s. During this period they raised young almost every year. They were of an unknown age when they came into my possession in 1968. This period of reproduction will help substantiate my earlier claim as to the reproductive capacity of this species.

I believe in close-banding all my young birds with a closed metal ring, which has particular information stamped into it, i.e. reference to 31-1-81. You can keep a written record and use it for data collection at a later date.

Hopefully this short report on my experience with a breeding pair of Little Corellas will encourage others to take on the breeding and keeping of these beautiful and interesting cockatoos. Be careful when you mate up pairs you select from the same subspecies to avoid breeding a "mongrel" Little Corella.

Unfortunately I do not hold a pair of Little Corellas at present, but have a single young cock. I soon hope to venture back into this species to increase my studies on the corella group in general.

For further reference reading on Little Corellas these books are recommended reading:

*The World of Cockatoos* by Karl Diefenbach

*Parrots, Their Care and Breeding* by Rosemary Low

*Australian Cockatoos* by Stan Siendel and Robert Lynn

*Australian Parrots* by Joseph M. Forshaw

*Parrots of the World* by Joseph M. Forshaw

*Video Land of Parrots - White Cockatoos.*

**Editor's Note:** Most American aviculturists know the Little Corella as the Bare-eyed Cockatoo. Very few of the larger subspecies, *C.S. Sanguinea* found totally in Australia, are seen in American aviculture. These are usually the smaller subspecies, *C. S. Normantoni*. ●



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