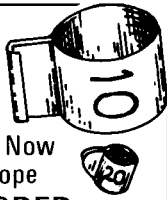


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Cockatiel Breeding Program

by Tom Squyres

Cockatiels have been kept and raised in America for about 75 years. In all these years little has been written from a practical standpoint of Cockatiel breeding. Most breeders still colony breed, "for a money crop" to supplement their aviary expense. If the Cockatiel is to progress, and new mutations developed, a change must be made. This will not be an easy change for those accustomed to breeding six pair of birds in a six by six foot cage.

It is not my intention to discredit colony breeding, as long as ample space is provided. The purpose is to encourage a controlled breeding of our birds. Don't be naive in thinking a male Cockatiel will not mate with two or more hens in his flight.

We raise Cockatiels throughout the year. This is accomplished by a climate controlled aviary. The summer temperature is maintained between 75 and 80 degrees. Winter temperature is maintained between 65 and 70 degrees. Humidity is kept at 50 percent or above. High humidity is maintained with a humidifier or in a small aviary a vaporizer. The lighting system is on an automatic timer. Lights are on 15 hours a day, 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. The type fluorescent bulb used is Duro-Test Vita-Life. We use a four foot bulb to light 40 square feet of floor space. Twenty-five watt night lights are also located throughout the aviary.

The construction of an aviary will vary in different geographical locations. It should be well insulated, dry and draft free. You should have ample walk space and work area. In general it should be well arranged, so as not to make your birds a chore.

All of our flights are 8 feet high. The breeding flights are 3 feet wide and 10 to

12 feet long. Each breeding flight accommodates one breeding pair. The aviary floor is concrete slab, covered with 2 inches of clean, fine gravel. The gravel serves a dual purpose, it retains humidity and is easily cleaned. I use a common lawn rake to rake the gravel once a week. Twice a year the gravel is removed, concrete floors disinfected, and gravel replaced.

It may seem like a waste of space to devote 30 or 40 square feet of floor space to one pair of breeding Cockatiels, but our birds would never admit it. If you give ample space to your birds, the end results will amaze you. In large uncrowded flights the birds breed more freely, the chicks come off quicker, and there is no feather picking. It is truly a way to enjoy your birds.

In addition to the breeding flights, we also have three flights 4 feet wide by 12 feet long. One is for youngsters and one each for resting hens and cocks. I would suggest the hen and cock flights be as far apart as possible. This will keep the love affairs to a minimum, and allow you to remate pairs of your choice more easily. Contrary to belief **COCKATIELS DO NOT MATE FOR LIFE**. Mate the birds to your advantage.

In the breeding flights hang two nest boxes for each pair of birds. Number the boxes so information can be recorded on your files. The nest box should be hung as high as possible, allowing 12 to 14 inches from the top of the box to the ceiling. The type box used is 12 inches square and 14 inches high, with a removable top. The entrance hole is 3 inches in diameter offset from the center, two inches from the top of the box. To the floor of the nest box add 2 or 3 inches of pine shavings.

The day you hang the nest box start a



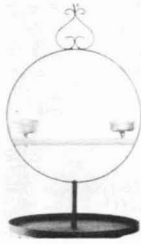
A normal Cockatiel chick at 18 days of age. The pinfeathers and crest show little color at this early age. Chicks usually leave the nest at five to six weeks after hatching. Both parents continue to feed them for several weeks after leaving the nest. They also guard them from other individuals in the colony.



Already at 18 days of age this Lutino Cockatiel chick shows white and yellow pinfeathers well developed and a beautiful yellow crest. These two eggs were infertile in a normal clutch of five eggs.

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routine schedule of nest inspection. **LOOK IN THE BOX!** Move the nesting material around, don't be afraid to touch the nest. You should inspect at least once a day, and at the same time each day. We check all nests at 7:30 a.m. and 7:30 p.m., and again just before lights out if there is any doubt. It is very important you condition your birds to this routine inspection, otherwise you will never know what goes on in the nest.

Mate only those birds in top condition. If the breeders are in a molt, or thin, do not put them up. A hen in condition will usually lay in 2 weeks. You can expect the first egg 7 to 10 days from the initial mating. A Cockatiel hen can lay a fertile egg three days after mating, however this is the exception. When the first egg is layed, number it with a fine felt tip pen. Mark each egg as it is layed and record the information. Candling may begin with the third egg. When you are sure an egg is infertile, remove it from the nest.

A fertile egg hatches in 17 to 20 days, depending on how tight the hen sets. Chicks fledge at about 35 days, the cock will continue to feed for two more weeks. When you are sure the fledglings are eating on their own, move them to the baby flight.

Two to three days before chicks are due to hatch start putting out nestling food. For the nestling food: mix six hard boiled eggs (peeled) with one cup Gerbers High Protein Cereal. To this add one tablespoon

calcium/phosphorus with D3. This should be mixed well and stored in the refrigerator until needed. Only mix what you will use in two or three days. Put the nestling food out in small dishes on the floor of the flight, do this as you make your morning rounds. As the chicks start to hatch increase to twice a day. Don't leave stale nestling food in the flights, wash each container before refilling.

Chicks should be banded at 2 to 3 weeks of age. If one slips past you, often you can wait until they have fledged for a couple of days and still band them. A chick will lose some of its baby fat after two or three days of flying.

A hen may recycle and start the second clutch before the first has fledged. This is the reason for the second nest box. Often a hen will move to this second nest and let the cock feed out the first clutch. Do not permit your birds more than two clutches a year. If the third clutch has started before you break up your birds, foster or destroy the eggs.

You will find it necessary to foster eggs or chicks at some time. The common reason is feather picking or not feeding. To foster you must have a place to foster, this is the reason it is wise to put up several pair of birds at one time. Cockatiels are great foster parents. I have moved eggs and chicks many times with no problems. In fact we have often shuffled chicks from two or three nests. One age group in one box, one another, etc. This insures better

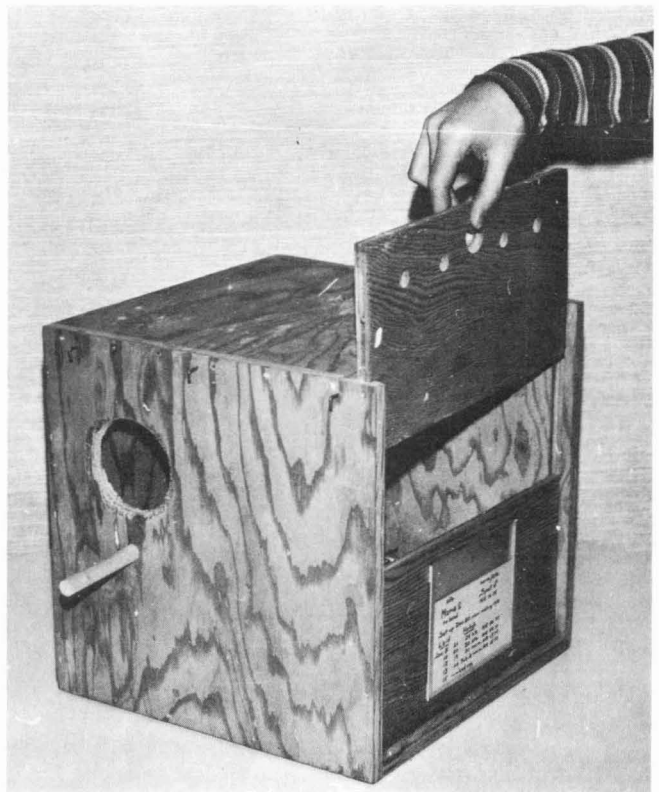


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feeding of all babies, a younger chick is not neglected and left to die. Record keeping and banding is important, it becomes a MUST when you move eggs or foster young.

Records should be kept simple, yet complete and easily referenced. A large calendar on the aviary wall is a good place to record the date each egg is laid. From this I count 16 days and mark in red the flight number. This reminds me to put nestling food in that flight two to three days before the chicks are due to hatch. A complete three generation pedigree card is also on file for each bird. For quick reference you can use a loose leaf notebook. This will show the chick's band number, date hatched, color and parents' band number.

I find it helpful to include a reference number in the notebook and on the pedigree card.

The diet we follow is quite simple, the birds are allowed to select the seeds of their choice. Everything is fed in separate dishes. Large sunflower seed and parakeet mix is always available. The parakeet mix consists of 45% canary seed, 45% white millet and 10% oat groats. For this mix two 5 gallon plastic buckets are used. One marked "breeder" to which is added one cup of Rex wheat germ oil (1/2 one day and mix, 1/2 the second day and mix). I mix again on the third day and feed to all birds in the breeding flights. The second bucket is marked "condition," the wheat germ is cut in half and 1/2 cup Emulsion is added. The condition mix is fed to all young and resting birds. Safflower seed and/or raw shelled peanuts are fed two to three times per week. Whole wheat bread is given each morning. Fresh greens are fed two to three times a week, remove what is not eaten. Fresh raw corn on the cob is fed when available. Drinking water is supplied in pop bottle type drinkers. This is changed every two days and supplemented with one drop of Avitron per ounce of water.

All flights are provided with cuttle bones, mineral blocks and salt spools. Kellogg's Petamine is also available. The only diet change we have made in the past year is the elimination of grit. A one year test program convinced me that grit was not necessary for any type bird.

Cockatiels are ground foraging birds. We feed cafeteria style on the floor of the flights. This enables the birds to get more exercise flying down to the food and back to the perch. Fresh bath water should be provided each day. Large earthenware bowls make an excellent facility. If you wish to spray your bird (which they love) use tap water and spray in the morning only.

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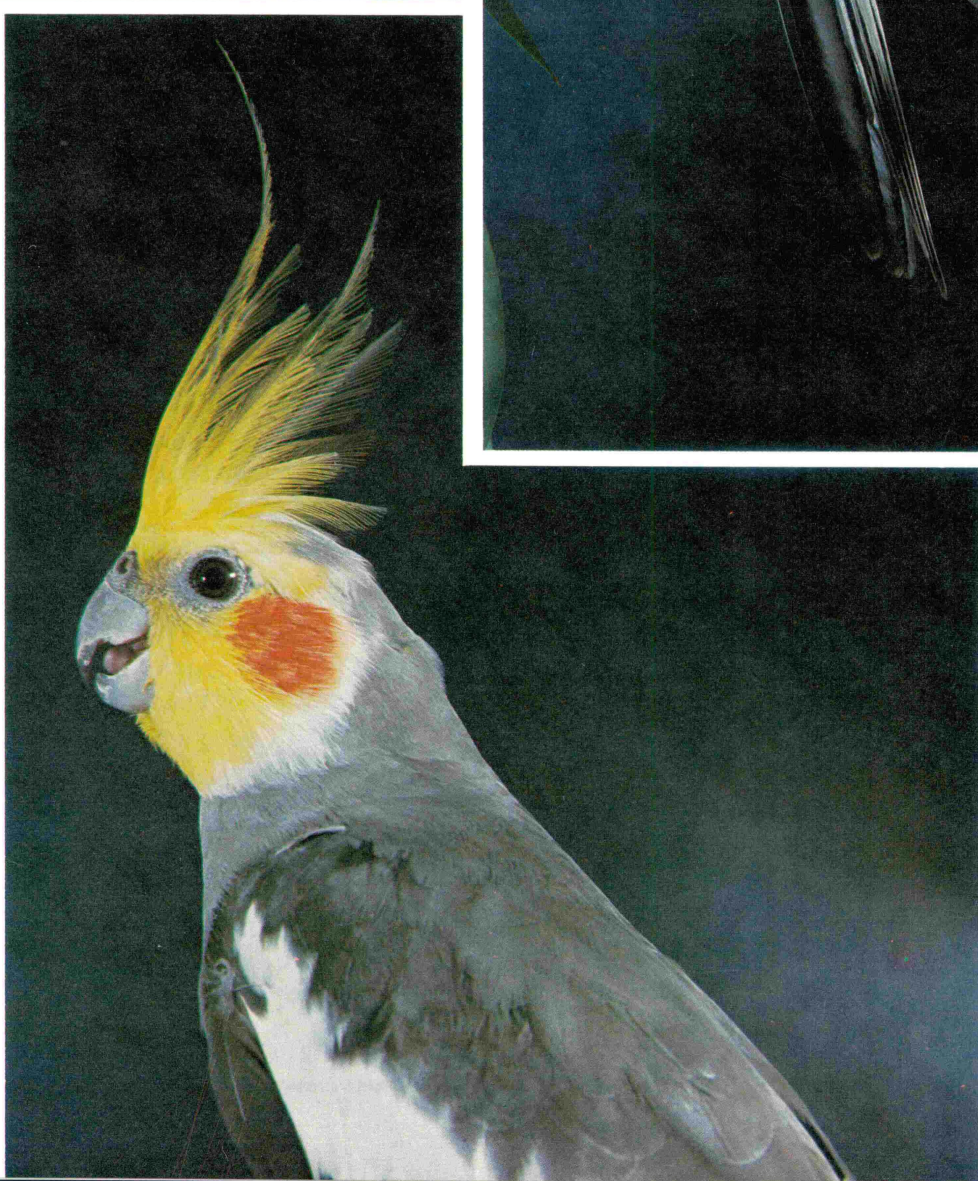
*Normal
male*



Normal female Cockatiel



*Head of
Normal male Cockatiel,
Nymphicus hollandicus.*



Photos courtesy of San Diego Zoo.