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Bouncer, the bouncing baby umbrella cockatoo

by Vicki Fletcher
Puyallup, Washington

Of all the various species of psittacines I have kept, the genus *Cacatua* will probably always be my favorite. My very first cockatoo was purchased in 1981 from a pet shop, a beautiful citron hen. She was very tame and loving and I was hooked. I named her Aphrodite, as she appeared to me to be a goddess of love and beauty. Aphrodite just produced her first baby in May of 1988.

This story is of my very first cockatoo baby; the traumas I went through as a novice, learning many things the hard way. I hope from this that others will learn as I relate my experiences, both good and bad.

In May of 1983, I purchased my first pair of umbrella or white cockatoos, *Cacatua alba*. After careful isolation at my home, they were introduced into my bird room and given a ten gallon, metal garbage can which was attached to the outside of their cage on its side. They immediately took to their nest box and I have hardly seen them since. I had given them a combination of ground corn cobs and wood shavings as nesting materials to which they added pieces of their perch, feathers

and dust.

In June, 1984, they laid their first egg. It was discovered broken on the bottom of the cage. On close inspection of the nest can, I could tell the egg had been broken inside and then tossed out by the parents. There was egg yolk in the garbage can.

Cockatoos have very strong beaks and these two umbrellas had chewed the head off one of the nails that held the garbage can onto the side of their cage. Apparently, with only three nails left to hold it on, the can rocked enough to make it unstable for the birds. Whether this caused the egg to get broken or if one of the birds accidentally did it will remain a mystery. Be sure nest boxes are attached securely to avoid this disappointment. Needless to say, they were immediately given a new, wooden, L-shaped nest box. During the remainder of 1984, these birds continued to stay in their nest box but there were no more eggs.

1984 had been the year to re-do my bird room. I had outgrown the one that I had, so I took over another bedroom of my home. All the little birds, the budgerigars and cockatiels, were

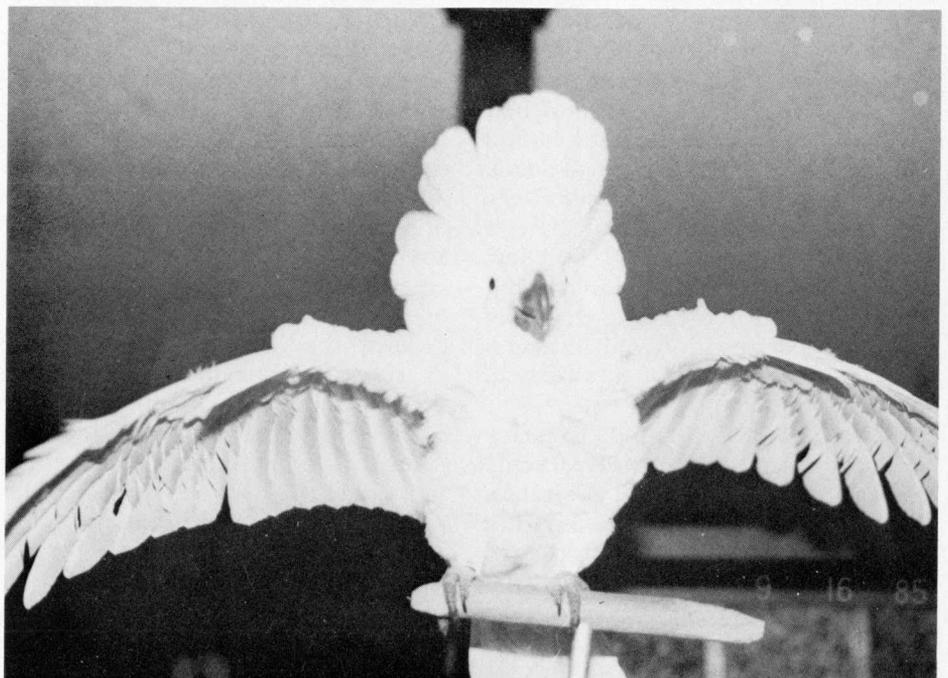


Photo by Vicki Fletcher

Bouncer at 12 weeks.

moved to the new room. New cages were made to fit the old bird room for the larger birds.

The last of the new cages arrived on New Year's eve, 1984, and the cockatoos were placed in their new cage on that day. Their new cage measured two feet wide by four feet long by three feet high. They were given a nest box that was eighteen inches by twelve inches by twelve inches high.

On January 5, 1985, when I checked the nest box for the first time since they had been moved, they had two eggs. I could hardly believe it. They had only been in this cage five days. As it turned out, both eggs were clear; probably due to the fact that the cockatoos had chewed up the perch in their old cage and I had failed to replace it because I knew their new cage would be coming soon. (If only . . . you know how it is.)

I decided to let them keep these two eggs and assess their performance as parents. They sat very tight and took excellent care of both eggs. I pestered them a lot so I would know just how far I could go with them. All went well until the last week of incubation. Somehow they managed to crack both eggs, but they still took excellent care of them.

I decided to try another nest box since they had chewed the front off that one and I was having problems keeping nesting materials in it. The new nest box was made of 3/4-inch plywood and was L-shaped. The size was twenty-four inches by fifteen inches by twenty-four inches high. Again, they immediately took to it. The only time I ever get to see this pair is when I actually force them out of the nest box.

On May 23, 1985, another egg was laid. I looked at it with indecision. This was the third time they had laid and I didn't have a baby cockatoo to show for all their efforts, not to mention mine. I decided since they had screwed up twice, this third time was my turn, hopefully not to screw up.

On May 25, 1985, another egg was laid. The eggs were incubated at 99.5 degrees dry and 86 degrees wet bulb. On the fifth day of incubation, I detected something new in egg number 2 and on the sixth day I was positive it was fertile as I could see movement. Egg number 1 was clear.

The days of incubation seemed like an eternity. From every piece of information I could find, umbrella eggs were to hatch at 25 to 27 days. On the 26th day it pipped. The following day



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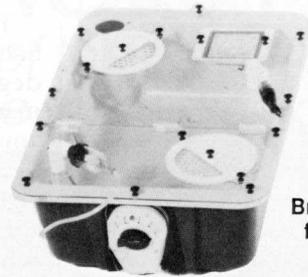
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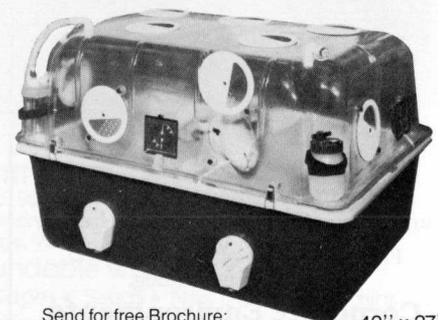


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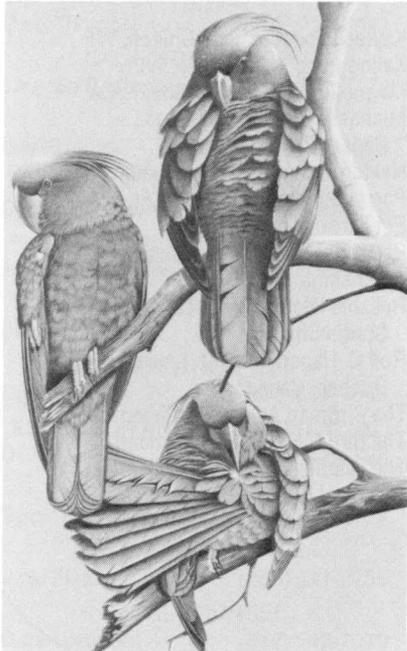
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it was continuing to pip but was doing it wrong. It had made a circle about the size of a dime. Nervous as I was, I decided it was time to get some knowledgeable help. I called upon two people that I am very indebted to — Marge and Joe Longo. It was only from their encouragement that I was able to leave the egg alone. When I got up on the morning of the 28th day, I could hear it chirping but the pipping was at the same stage.

It was a good thing for that egg that I had plans to attend the Washington Budgerigar Society's Annual Baby Show that day. I was very unsure if I should leave the egg or not. I phoned home several times to check on it. Nothing had happened. At least since I had gone to the baby show, my mind was slightly off the egg. My budgies did quite well that day on the bench. In the Bar Head Division (young babies that have not molted yet) I took Best in Show, and also had a fifth, sixth and ninth Best Novice. I had looked forward to returning home, hoping to find a baby cockatoo.

Much to my disappointment, things were the same at home. There was very little change in the egg except it was chirping louder. Exhausted as I was and after another call to the Longos, I went to sleep. At 7 a.m., June 23, 1985, the 29th day and 68 hours after the first pip, I proclaimed, "I have a baby cockatoo!"

The baby was moved from the incubator and placed into a brooder at 98 degrees. He weighed in at approximately 20 grams. There was a small amount of membrane attached to the head and side of the face. It peeled right off without any problem. There was a little blood on the umbilical cord which, without attention, dried up within an hour. At 9 a.m. the baby was fed .5 cc of lactated Ringer's. The baby took it willingly and pumped a lot. He was fed every time his crop was empty which was about once an hour. He consumed between .5 cc and 1.0 cc each time. The feedings on this first day consisted of strained rice cereal with apples and bananas, lactated Ringer's or water, and an acidophilus product. On the second day, he was started on a formula that contained monkey chow, oatmeal cereal with applesauce and bananas, and peanut butter.

By the third day he was on a two hour schedule and was consistently eating 1 cc per feeding. The feet were beginning to darken. On the fifth day the eyes started opening a tiny slit, and

he was eating 3-plus ccs per feeding and had doubled the hatch weight.

On the eighth day the temperature of the brooder was lowered to between 90 and 92 degrees. The weight was 65.6 grams and he was eating 5 to 6 ccs ever two hours. The feet were getting darker and the beak was turning darker too. The skin was beginning to look like a plucked chicken. He did not seem as strong as he had been.

On the ninth day, I had a veterinarian examine him and we took blood and ran a fecal culture. The baby had a proteus infection and the blood work-up was all messed up. The baby was started on oral medication and injections. (I had never given injections before and to have to do it to my poor little baby cockatoo broke my heart.) I began running cultures on everything the baby had been in contact with to try to determine where the proteus had come from, as this was a bacteria with which I had no experience. Finally, the proteus was isolated in the monkey chow. I had been very anxious to try a formula developed for cockatoos and had not been able to find the particular brand of monkey chow that this formula called for. I finally found a pet shop that was willing to sell me a few pounds from an open bag they had in their shop. I am not exactly sure how it happened, but my suspicions are that someone failed to properly wash their hands prior to re-packaging the sack of monkey chow I was sold. I have continued to use the same brand of monkey chow in my hand-feeding formula to date, but now always purchase unopened bags. I have cultured every bag since and have never had any bacterial growth at all. The formula was immediately changed to my old formula on which I had successfully raised baby cockatiels and Quakers. The cockatoo baby was getting four injections a day. On the thirteenth day he was taken off the injections but continued on the oral medication. He had continued to gain throughout all this and weighed 121.7 grams. He had a lot of pin feathers and the beak and feet continued getting darker. At two weeks of age, he was eating 15 ccs each feeding.

Due mainly to the setback this baby had been through, I was still feeding through the night. On the sixteenth day when I got up for the 3 a.m. feeding, I found the baby limp on the floor of the brooder. The temperature in the brooder was 115 degrees. The baby had managed to get hold of the thermostat and had pulled it loose. (This will not happen again as it has been moved

to the top of the brooder.) I immediately removed the baby and held him for about twenty minutes until his temperature was down. I have since learned that the baby would have been better off if I would have cooled him off quicker; possibly by taking him outside into a cooler temperature. He was very dehydrated so I gave 1 cc of lactated Ringer's every half hour. At 8 a.m. he was weak, but hungry. He was fed his formula thinned with lactated Ringer's and given an additional 3 ccs lactated Ringer's every hour. He kept panting if the temperature was above 82 degrees. I weighed him at 1:30 p.m. and he had gained 24 grams from the previous day.

The seventeenth day he was doing much better and had gained another 17 grams, now 201 grams. I, too, had screwed up, but I knew this baby was going to pull through all of this and that it was time to give him a name. I decided to name this strong, enormous fighter "Bouncer." No matter what I put this baby through, he just kept bouncing back.

At twenty-four days, I gave up the night feedings. At thirty-nine days, he weighed 520 grams and was eating 50 to 75 ccs per feeding. He was learning to stand on one foot and stretching a lot. Bouncer continued to increase in size to 621 grams at eight weeks, with no more major problems. Over the weaning process, which took almost seven weeks, he lost 100 grams. Bouncer is now three years old and currently weighs 560 grams. He lives a very happy life being the center of attention in my kitchen.

One of the most important things I learned in raising this baby cockatoo is that no matter how careful and cautious you are, if something is going to go wrong, it will go wrong with the baby cockatoo, not the baby cockatiel.

One other thing I have learned — everything you have ever heard about hand-raised cockatoos being extremely loving, docile and spoiled is all true.

The pair of umbrellas continued to chew on their nest box until I finally broke down and gave them a metal nest box. They have laid eggs again since Bouncer, and continue to manage to break them. I did manage to patch, with clear nail polish, two fertile eggs they were incubating (I have also used denture adhesive) and they successfully hatched both babies. Now, if only I could teach them the proper way to feed them . . . (they are having great difficulty learning how to hold the syringe). ●

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