

America's Best Cockatiels

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The aviculturist has seemingly boundless species to choose from. One excellent choice is the cockatiel. It is readily available in all areas of America. The prices range from very reasonable for normal birds to fairly high for the newer mutations. It is possible to pay more for a cockatiel than a cockatoo.

The popularity of these birds is at an all time high and there is good reason for this. They are hearty, not requiring any extraordinary conditions to maintain them in good health. Temperature and diet tolerances allow for great variance. They adapt very well when conditions are kept within reason.

Breeding success can be as easy as placing a bird of each gender in a cage and adding a nest box. It can also be the frustration of incompatible pairs fighting, not mating, laying eggs on the floor of the cage, not incubating, not feeding chicks, etc. The avid cockatiel breeder will, with time, dedication and accrued know-

ledge, overcome the obstacles and eventually produce many young birds of quality. In fact, the cockatiels start looking so good to you, that you begin to believe they are the best anywhere. How do you prove it?

The natural progression for the successful breeder is the show bench. There are plenty of opportunities to show your birds as most bird shows offer a cockatiel division. Many of these divisions are judged by qualified panel judges of either the American or National cockatiel societies. These two national societies evolved with the great popularity of the species.

There is now a standard of perfection, a guide that the breeder can use to develop birds that most show-oriented cockatiel breeders use as the basis of their pairings for show birds. While everyone doesn't agree on all the aspects of the show standard, it is, of course, necessary as a means of evaluating what most

people consider desirable characteristics.

Viewing the cockatiel at length, you can see the bird was designed for swift flight and rapid maneuvering. Its large pectoral muscles, long tapered wings and tail allow flying that is a wonder to behold.

The show standard does nothing to detract from this beauty. It does emphasize certain areas, however. Showbirds have larger heads and straight back lines. They show round eyes, neatly tucked in lower mandibles and symmetry of wing length, tail length and body size. The most striking difference in these domestic show birds and their wild ancestors is size. Many show cockatiels weigh well over 150 grams. The wild birds of Australia range closer in size to English budgerigars than show type American cockatiels. There is, of course, this American obsession that bigger is better. The projected size of 17 inches overall length seems to be excessive. This could, however, be a



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moot point as the cockatiel's physiology may not permit this large bird to evolve.

The breeder-exhibitor has a good deal more control over two aspects of showing. They are condition and deportment. It is possible, by good diet, frequent spraying with water, and separating to avoid feather plucking, to bring your show stock into prime condition. You should be putting the show birds into show type cages and moving them about in them. They will eventually feel comfortable in this show box and stay up on the perches where the judge can evaluate their qualities. Birds that stay on the floor tend to get dirty and fray feathers. These birds pay heavily for this tendency. Up to 25 percent of potential points could be detracted for lack of condition and deportment. The exhibitor's extra effort in this area quite often is the difference between winning and losing. Exhibitors who excel generally specialize to some degree. While cockatiel mutations aren't infinite, they are certainly varied enough in color and pattern to allow for personal preferences. The judge will show no partiality of one mutation



Photo by Ron Filip

There is now a standard of perfection, a guide that the cockatiel breeder can use to develop birds suitable for the show bench. Both the American and National Cockatiel Societies have qualified judges for show cockatiels.

over another. No consideration is given regarding the difficulty to produce any single or multiple of mutations visible on one bird. It is generally easier to produce show quality

normals or genetically sex linked mutations rather than the recessive mutations. The recessives have a tendency of being smaller. This is a major obstacle for a show bird to overcome, so much emphasis is placed on size. Adding a second factor to these recessive birds can tend to increase size if it is sex linked. An example would be adding the pearl factors to the pied (recessive) or, better yet, pearl and cinnamon to pied can produce larger birds of good body type and feather quality. The panel judge would assess this bird with consideration given to the quality of all three factors

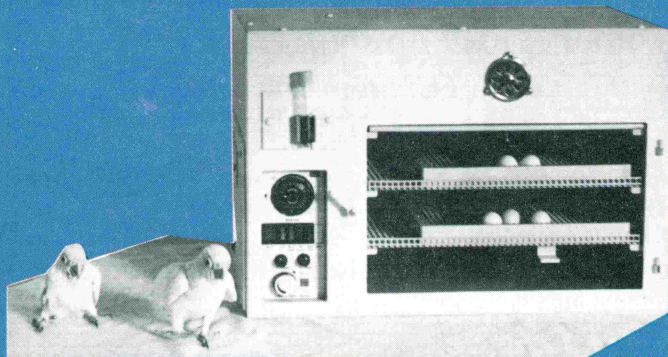
The birds generally categorized as rare have difficulty competing also. These mutations are the white face, albino, silver and fallow. Once again, size is against them. Some also tend to show bald spots. The fallow seems to be frail in addition to having major show faults. They do, however, have a delicate beauty. This red eyed recessive has a heavy wash of yellow over the light beige ground color. Females exhibit the same brilliant yellow faces as the males, adding greatly to their appeal. The fallow is an excellent choice to out cross to the large, robust normal. I can envision this mutation a future winner if it attains the normal's vigor and size while retaining its own unique appeal.

You may already be raising America's best cockatiels. You can prove it by entering the shows. ●

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