

# Cockatiel (Weero)

**FAMILY:** *Cacatuidae*

**GENUS:** *Nymphicus*

**SPECIES:** *hollandicus*

## **Description:**

Very small cockatoo with grey plumage and distinctive white wing patches. Yellow face and crest with orange cheek patches. Adult females are duller than males with a grey crest.

Immature birds resemble adult females.

Length: 320-350mm.

Weight: 80-100grams.

## **Other Names:**

Quarrion; Wearo.

## **Distribution:**

Common over most of mainland Australia except Cape York Peninsula and the humid south-east. The Cockatiel has been recorded in Tasmania but this is almost certainly attributable to escaped aviary birds.

The Cockatiel is strongly migratory and is found to be rare south of about 30 degrees south in winter. Its movements are strongly influenced by rainfall however.

## **Habitat:**

arid and semi-arid open country, usually near water.

## **Diet:**

Seeds, cereal crops, fruits and berries.

## **Breeding:**

Strongly influenced by rainfall and other conditions but is usually from July to December in the interior southeast.

The usual nesting site is a large hollow limb at heights varying from 1m. to 10m. Hollow depths are typically about 50cm.

In captivity Cockatiels prefer vertical or inclined hollow logs of about 50cm depth and an internal diameter of about 30cm. They will also readily accept a medium to large nesting box (about 45cm x 30cm x 30cm) with an internal ladder (usually made of wire). Preferred nesting material is wood shavings. Note that Cockatiels are rather messy nesters and their nests should be cleaned after each brood has been fledged.

## **Courtsip Display**

Mutual preening is often observed in this species. However courtship displays are rare. Some males do display on occasion, and this involves an approach to a female with a hopping and bobbing motion so often seen in other cockatoos. This may be accompanied with a low whistle.

## **Sexual Maturity:**

Unlike all the other cacatuids, the Cockatiel becomes sexually mature at 9 to 12 months of age.

## **Sexing Your Cockatiel:**

When you only have one bird it can be confusing as to which sex it is. Many owners have had quite a shock when the bird they have been calling Harry for a couple of years suddenly starts laying eggs. In fact it is very hard to sex young Cockatiels. Some old wives tale that aren't true include males having brighter cheek patches **FALSE**, spots, lack of spots on the feathers under the wings means it's a male **FALSE**. A breeder may be able to confirm the sex of a bird for you depending on the genetics of the particular bird. If this is not possible the only sure way is to observe their behaviour to distinguish cock from hens

## **Clutch:**

2-8 white oval eggs. Incubation period: about 19 days. Fledging usually occurs at about 30 days.

## **Mutations and Hybrids:**

Basic mutations include: Lutino (sex linked); Pied (dominant); Pearl (sex linked) ; Cinnamon (sex linked); Australian Red-eyed Cinnamon (recessive); Red-eyed Silver (recessive); Black-eyed White (recessive); White-faced (recessive); Australian Cinnamon (sex linked); Australian Fallow (inheritance undetermined); Dilute or Black-eyed Silver (dominant). Hybrids between this species and Red Rumped Parrot, Blue-winged Parrot and Eastern Rosella have been recorded.

## **Suitable Aviaries and Compatible Birds**

As a minimum, a single bird may be housed in a cage measuring at least 500mm x 500mm x 800mm (approximately). Pairs can be kept in a slightly larger cage. However, these birds always fare better (and look more spectacular) in larger aviaries.

## **Species Specific Problems**

Intestinal worms are a common problem in species which spend time on the ground.

Similarly, fungal infections may become a problem. These are relatively easily dealt with however simply by maintaining a high standard of hygiene.

Another problem encountered in this species is Psittacine beak and feather disease. This is an incurable disease which is transmitted through faeces. Essentially, it results in poor feather growth and feathers which don't replace themselves when they fall out. Similarly, the beak is also affected and becomes fragile and does not repair itself. The bills of birds with this condition have a deep black, glossy appearance rather than the normal chalky grey colour.

It is advisable to test birds suspected to have this condition. The best course of action for affected birds is to destroy them as there is no cure. Infected birds will infect their offspring simply by feeding them as there is always chances of contact with faeces in the nest and during feeding of the young.

Feather plucking may also be a problem.