



## **Your First Cockatiel – preparation, advice and care**

Before you get your first Cockatiel you should do your homework and find out as much as you can, so you are prepared. Cockatiels have a lifespan of 15 to 20 years, so it is a long-term commitment and with it comes great responsibility. Hopefully, this will give you a good start.

The Cockatiel - *Nymphicus hollandicus* originated from Australia (formerly called New Holland hence its scientific name), where it is found in open spaces generally near water. It was first brought to the UK in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Although only 12 inches (30cm) from the tip of its long, straight tail to its crest, the Cockatiel is considered by most authorities to be a member of the Cockatoo family. It is now quite domesticated having been bred for many generations in captivity. The natural colour is a body of white and grey, orange cheek patches and a yellow crest, both of which are much brighter in the male. Females of the normal grey type, when mature, have bars underneath the tail. Due to selective breeding, they are now available in a wide range of colour variants for you to choose from.

Your first decision will be whether you are going to keep one as a house pet or a pair for breeding. This will determine the housing that you require. The best cage for a single house pet will be made of metal wire and should be a minimum of 60cm x 40cm and be 60cm tall. If caging your Cockatiel in the house be aware that fumes from the kitchen, especially those from overheating non-stick pans, are harmful to all birds. Do not place the cage in hot or draughty areas or in strong sunlight where the bird cannot shelter. The cage commonly sold for a Budgie will be much too small. Similarly, Cockatiels have strong beaks and standard Budgie toys will be unsuitable.

A breeding aviary should be a minimum of 2 metres long x 1 metre wide and be 2 metres tall. This should have a roof to protect the birds from the weather and have a dry, draught-free shelter for them to retreat into. Cockatiels are hardy birds and are usually ok in Britain if housed this way. Nest boxes, which should be made of 15mm plywood, should be 30cm high and be 22 - 25cm square. The hole should be 6cm in diameter (the birds will make this bigger if they require it) and the base of the box should have a layer of untreated wood shavings. Both cages and aviaries should have natural perches of different diameters – branches cut from fruit trees are ideal.

Cockatiels do well if fed on a good quality mix of seeds, a proprietary Cockatiel or Parrakeet mix is ideal, but this must be supplemented daily with small pieces of fresh fruit, vegetables and greens. Do not feed chocolate, cabbage, potatoes, avocados or citrus fruits - as these can be harmful. When they are breeding they appreciate some moistened egg food. Mineral supplements and oyster shell grit can be added to this. Fresh, clean water should be available at all times for both drinking and bathing.

Cockatiels on average lay 4 eggs in a clutch, but more is not uncommon. The eggs will be brooded by both parents for approximately 3 weeks. The chicks will be in the nest for a further 3 weeks and will be independent at 8 - 9 weeks old. The chicks can be ringed with closed aluminium size P rings at around the time that their eyes start to open. They will continue to put on weight for the next few weeks and will be fully mature at approximately 9 months old.

Cockatiels are ideal household pets as they become quite tame and are not too noisy. They are great fun and educational for children and are great companions for the elderly. The males are usually the better mimics and will learn a few words, but are especially gifted at picking up whistles or tunes. Repeat the words or tune you would like the bird to say as often as possible. Use the same words and tone of voice, until this is learnt. You can then move on to new words or tunes, but do not forget to occasionally remind them of previously learnt words.