Cockatiels (Nymphicus hollandicus) Species Profile: Coloration, Diet, and Care

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Nymphicus hollandicus

Appearing much like a smaller version of the cockatoo, cockatiels are called quarrion in Australia. A gentle and docile bird, cockatiels are nomadic, ranging across the Australian grasslands and savannah looking for food and appropriate nest sites.

Cockatiels are the smallest member of the cockatoo family (Cacatuidae), sharing many similarities including the characteristic crest, broad head, and males and females that share incubation responsibilities. Cockatiel males also do not display any obvious courtship rituals. When danger is suspected, both cockatiels and cockatoos adopt a crouching posture. From this stance, they slowly sway back and forth, slightly lift the wings and emit a sort of hissing sound. It is believed that no other Australian parrots exhibit a similar fear reaction.

Unlike their larger cousins (who can sometimes be somewhat stubborn and reactive to change), cockatiels are very flexible and adaptable birds. Although males tend to be better vocalists and are sometimes more aggressive, both males and females make excellent pets providing they are handled and tamed at an early age. Cockatiels range in price from $80-$100.

Quick Stats: Cockatiels	
Family: Cacatuidae **Origin:** Australia - grasslands and open savannah **Size:** 10"-13" **Coloration:** Color varieties include the normal grey found in the wild, lutino, pearl, pied, cinnamon, fallow, and charcoal; in most cases, the cheek patches of males are brighter than those of females. • Grey - predominantly grey body, yellow head and crest, orange cheek patches and white wing patches. • Lutino (albino) - predominantly white body, pale yellow breast, tail and wings, yellow head and crest; both sexes exhibit yellow cheek patches. • Pearl (opaline or laced) - nape of neck, across back, and upper wing coverts have a center pallor due to absence of melanin in center portion of wing shaft, resulting in pale feather patches on each side of feather shaft, arranged in a leaf-like distribution pattern	**Diet:** 65-80% pelleted food, 15-30% vegetables, and 5% fruits. Use many varieties of fruits and vegetables, washed thoroughly. See Basic Nutrition for Psittacines (Parrot Family) for more information. **Cage Size:** At least 20" square, 24" high, and large enough to accommodate toys and perches without crowding, preferably with horizontal bars to facilitate climbing. Bars should not be farther apart than ¾ inches. **Compatibility/Disposition:** Does well with others of the same species, often congregating in large flocks in the wild. Once tamed, can be very affectionate. **Vocalization:** Prolonged warble and sings, chirps, talks with training at 8-10 months. **Playfulness:** Must be handled at a young age or will be fairly standoffish as an adult. **Life Span:** 5-25 years in captivity. 30+ years in the wild.

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distribution pattern.

- Pied (harlequin) - can show extremes from nearly white overall to nearly grey overall with a few white feathers. More often, head and back are white, crest and throat yellow, orange cheek patches, upper wing coverts grey, flight and tail feathers yellow.
- Cinnamon - melanin produced in feather shafts is brown rather than black, giving feathers a pale, brownish-grey to coffee brown appearance, depending on underlying yellow highlights.
- Fallow (red-eyed silver) - overall body color of silver, yellow crest, eyes appear pink (similar to Lutino) due to lack of melanin.
- Charcoal (white-faced) - predominantly grey body, white face.

Grooming: Trim flight feathers, beak, and nails as necessary.

Age at Maturity: 6 months
Nesting Sites in the Wild: Tree hollows
Breeding Season: Nesting between August and December; however, breeding season varies greatly depending on climate, especially rainfall (more rain encourages breeding).
Sexing: Generally, mature males have brighter yellow faces and brighter orange cheek patches; males normally sing and whistle while females are fairly quiet; males are often more aggressive than females.
Special: Taming is best done at a young age. Some birds exhibit Cockatiel Thrashing Syndrome, also called Night Frights. In this syndrome, the bird will suddenly start thrashing in the middle of the night. Of unknown cause, it can often be controlled by covering the cage at night (also a good practice to encourage the 12:12 daylight to darkness schedule they require).

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