



# *The Avicultural Society of New South Wales (ASNSW)*

*(Founding in 1940 as the Parrot & African Lovebird Society of Australia)*

## Competition Winner (Junior Section)

### The Cockatiel

#### *Nymphicus hollandicus (Kerr)*

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By Mark Atkinson

### (PART I)

#### Introduction

The [Cockatiel](#) is often known as the Quarrion and sometimes as the Weiro or Cockatoo Parrot. It is the sole species in the Nymphicinae subfamily.

#### Description

##### Male:

The general plumage is grey but the underparts are sometimes paler and washed with brown. The head is yellow extending down to the throat and up to the crest. The ear coverts are orange and the wing coverts are white. The tail and bill are dark grey, the iris is brown and the legs are grey.



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##### Female:

The head is grey tinged with dull yellow. The ear coverts are dull orange. The rump, lower underparts and central tail feathers are light grey lightly barred with pale yellow. Outermost tail feathers yellow irregularly barred with dark grey.

##### Immatures:

Similar to adult female.

#### Distribution

Cockatiels inhabit most of Australia particularly the interior although they are not present in Tasmania. They are found in most types of open country particularly in the vicinity of water, in trees bordering a watercourse for example. In northern Australia the Cockatiel is highly nomadic but towards the south it becomes migratory arriving in Victoria, New South Wales and southern South Australia in spring and leaving in late summer and autumn. During seasons that are exceptionally dry their movements are noticed to a greater extent for they may appear in coastal areas where they have not been seen for many years.

#### General Notes

##### Habits:

These parrots are generally seen in pairs or small flocks on the ground searching for grass seeds or flying above the scattered trees out on the open plains. They are not timid and will usually allow a close approach. If they are disturbed they seek refuge in a nearby tree returning to the ground as soon as the danger has passed. They have the habit of flying to large dead trees where they perch lengthways along stout limbs.

While foraging on the ground in the shade of a tree or bush, they are easily overlooked so well does their plumage blend with the ground cover. However on the wing they are conspicuous and noisy. Their flight is swift and direct, the backward swept pointed wings being moved with deliberate, rhythmic motion; the white wing patches are obvious.

### **Natural Foods:**

Cockatiels feed on the seeds of grasses, herbaceous plants, shrubs and trees, and on fruit grain and berries. They seem to be fond of [acacia](#) seeds, the berries of [mistletoe](#) and other native plants. They have also been seen feeding in mixed flocks with [Red-rumped parrots](#) and occasional they raid standing crops.

### **Call:**

The contact call which is used frequently is a prolonged warbling "queel-queel" ending with an upward inflection repeated three or four times, then followed by a brief pause and repeated yet again.

## **Aviary Notes**

### **Housing:**

Cockatiels do not need a very large aviary and will breed quite freely in an aviary 8ft long. They get along quite well with most other birds in captivity and will breed successfully in a mixed collection if given a choice of boxes and adequate privacy. Even though they are quiet birds in that they keep to themselves, they will defend their nest strongly against some of the larger [broad-tails](#).

### **Feeding:**

I've found that a mixture of budgie mix, plain canary and a small amount of sunflower seed supplemented with some fruit, plenty of greens, any grass that might be seed-bearing at the time and the occasional cuttlebone, keeps the birds in good condition. Whilst they are breeding I make sure that they have more than enough seed at all times and I add more sunflower than usual. I also increase the amount of fruit and greens that they normally get. As well as their food they are given fresh drinking water daily.

### **Breeding:**

Excluding [Budgerigars](#), Cockatiels are probably the easiest of all the Australian parrots to breed. They will breed in a mixed collection but for best results an average sized aviary to themselves is desirable. There is no fixed breeding season for Cockatiels in captivity but they seem to go down more frequently in the summer months.

Unlike most birds, Cockatiels do not mind a nesting box larger than necessary. A suitable size might be 30cm long, 24cm broad and 20cm high. The male bird likes to be able to see out of the box while standing inside, therefore the hole should be placed approximately 15cm from the bottom of the box and be around 6cm in diameter. The bottom of the box should have a covering of sawdust which takes the place of the decayed wood dust that is used in the wild. A choice of boxes should be given if possible.

The female will lay between 4-7 white eggs approximately 25 x 19mm on every second day. Both birds incubate them in turn, the male sitting from early morning until late afternoon. The eggs will hatch in 18-20 days after incubation has commenced. Once, a pair of my Cockatiels laid four eggs which hatched 5 1/2 weeks (38 days) later. The reason for this was probably that the birds did not start incubating until 2 1/2 weeks after the eggs had been laid.

The young are fed by both parents and will leave the nest 4-5 weeks after hatching; males acquire the bright facial colouration of adults when about 6 months old but retain the barred tail until the first complete moult.

### **Taming:**

Cockatiels make excellent pets, especially ones that have been hand-reared, they become quite affectionate. They will learn to say a few words but whistling is what they're best at.

## Conclusion

If someone was to ask me to suggest a bird that is inexpensive, pretty, relatively easy to breed and look after as well as becoming a good pet, I would immediately recommend the Cockatiel. Being one of the best birds for beginners, you will also find them in most experienced parrot breeder's collections. Of course the normal is not the only kind of Cockatiel available. Pied, white and pearl are just three other varieties. Overall, I think that Cockatiels are almost the ideal bird for an aviculturist and that probably explains their popularity.

## (PART II)

### My experiences

The following is a summary of my experience with the Cockatiels:

My first bird was a cock bird given to me as a gift and remained in a 7ft aviary containing budgies for 8 months. Then I bought a hen and put them in an 8ft aviary along with a pair of [Twenty-eight](#) Parrots and a pair of doves whilst I erect some more aviaries.

When the aviaries were complete, I put them in one which was 8ft long by themselves. Almost immediately they went to nest laying five eggs, they sat very tightly and were very protective. All the eggs hatched but one of the young died, the other four were reared successfully. The male continued feeding them for two weeks after they had left the nest. In the meantime the hen laid another five eggs. I removed the young of the previous nest from the aviary. Four of the eggs hatched and they were all raised. At this stage I decided to give the breeding pair a rest so I took the nesting boxes out of the aviary.

I sold seven of the eight young, leaving me with the breeding pair and one cock bird. The following season they laid four eggs and hatched three which were once again reared successfully. Soon after that the breeding hen suddenly died for no apparent reason. I purchased two hens and placed them both with the two cock birds. Both cock birds became unusually aggressive towards each other so I separated the two pairs.

Within a month the two pairs had gone to nest and laid four eggs. In one of the nests all the eggs hatched but unfortunately one died and the remaining three were raised. In the other nest I was not so lucky, of the four eggs three hatched and when they were about two weeks old there was an infestation of red mites. The Cockatiels survived for a week and then they all died (at the time, I had no information as to how to hand-rear baby birds).

Soon after this incident I had to sell the two hens and that was the last time that I had any success in breeding Cockatiels. The trouble lies in the fact that the last four hens that I have purchased have turned out to be cock birds. At present I have in my aviaries two white cock birds, one split/white cock bird and one normal cock bird and what I hope to be three normal hens. All the hens are approaching breeding age, and I'm certain that as soon as they do and are given favourable conditions, they will breed successfully for me.

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