

Cockatiel Concerns

The small, affectionate birds we call cockatiels (*Nymphicus hollandicus*) have undergone extensive modification through captive breeding. Color variations or mutations have increased in number over the years. The “Wild-type” or “Normal” cockatiel is the foundation of all mutations and is referred to as the “Grey” cockatiel. All other color variations are mutations from this gene pool. These include variations of Cinnamon, Charcoal or “White-faced”, Pearl, Albino, Lutino (“White”), Pied, “Yellow-faced”, “Pastel-faced”, and “Green” cockatiels.

Mutation Types

- As immature birds, “Pearl” cockatiels have “pearling” in both sexes; however, at maturity (>8 months) the male loses his color variation and reverts to the “Normal” wild type. He will pass on his pearl genes in subsequent breeding, but will not regain his pearl color pattern in later life.
- True Albino cockatiels are all white with red eyes.
- Lutinos have variability in their white feathers, but consistently throw a light yellow hue to their feathers. Many Lutinos are confused with albinos and are called “White” cockatiels.
- Pied means “two colored”. These birds have a base color on the body and head but varying degrees of grey on their wings, around their eyes, chest, and/or tail.

Recommendations for Cockatiel Owners:

- Juvenile cockatiels have poor navigational skills. Be EXTREMELY careful not to let babies jump or fall from heights over 2 to 3 feet, as this can cause severe tears to the rump or chest regions with subsequent bleeding and infection. This problem requires surgical repair and antibiotics.
- A good, balanced diet is of utmost importance to maintain as healthy a bird as possible! Cockatiels need adequate levels of dietary protein, and ample vitamins and minerals. A well balanced pellet-based diet can alleviate these concerns.
- As cockatiels get older, obesity with subsequent diabetes mellitus and liver disease is an important concern, especially in females.

Recommendations for Owners of Color Mutation Cockatiels:

- Through the process of mutation, some White or Lutino lines, including the Pied and Albino have developed behavioral aberrations that may be associated with stress or even injury in the bird.
- All “White” or Lutino lines should have a nightlight near their cage to prevent “night panic” or “night fright. Loss of the bird’s “foot-locking” ability during sleep has been theorized to causing them to fall off their perch at night and suddenly flail their wings with subsequent injury.
- Observe these mutations more closely for signs of weakness and a lack of resistance to disease. It is believed that these mutations have an overall poorly developed immune system.
- These birds may be more easily aroused than their “grey” counterparts. Be aware of episodes caused by earthquakes and their aftershocks, thunderstorms, hailstorms, or heavy winds. Fear associated with these events can cause uncontrolled wing flapping and the possibility of broken blood feathers or wing injury.
- Monitor egg layers carefully and supplement with calcium and vitamins to prevent egg binding, soft-shelled eggs, egg yolk peritonitis, bone fractures, or heart failure from depleted calcium stores. Owners of egg-laying hens, without males present, should leave the eggs in the cage until approximately 11 days after the last egg is laid. This will help prevent *overlaying* and further depletion of calcium stores.
- Some of these birds have been believed to have poor clotting mechanisms, possibly related to nutritional deficiencies. So be careful when anyone clips your bird’s wings or nails since they may be at increased risk for excessive bleeding.