

Animal Talk
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Cockatiel

Nymphicus hollandicus



Necessities:

- Cage
- Bedding
- Seed/Zupreem® Pellets
- Mineral block or Cuttlebone
- Millet spray

Extras:

- Perches
- Toys
- Treats

General:

Originally from Australia (where they are considered a pest), cockatiels are one of the most loving and social of the small hookbill family. They have an average lifespan of 12-15 years (20-30 on pellet diets—I actually have one that is over 23 years old!). They are so inquisitive and expressive that they have a tendency to become a well-loved member of the family. Cockatiels can also learn to say words and phrases. Almost all of our cockatiels are hand-raised from private breeders. Following you will find instructions that will help to make the transition from our home to yours less stressful for you and your new family member.

Handling/Exercise:

Cockatiels, like any other bird, are social, curious, energetic, playful and mischievous. They should have as much time out of the cage and with you as possible. We do recommend regular wing clipping (about twice yearly) to prevent them from accidentally flying into windows and walls or out an open door or window. Most of our birds are handfed, which means they were removed from the nest early and fed by human hands. This makes a much closer bond between you and the bird as it sees you as one of its flock.

They require a lot of attention. If you do not have a lot of time to spend with your new friend, you should have two. They will generally not nest in a two-bird situation. If you don't want to get another cockatiel, parakeets do very well as a buddy.

When finger-training the bird, DO NOT chase it around the cage. Birds think of the human in three parts: Your head they see as another bird, your body is the tree and your hand (especially when separated from the head and body by the bars of their cage) as the predator invading their nest. You can offer little tidbits such as millet spray or other favorite treats to coax them onto your finger, but if you are getting them out of the cage and they are flapping around they can injure themselves. Try using a lightweight hand towel covering your hand to carefully grab them and remove them from the cage. Sitting on the floor in a small, quiet room, set the bird on your finger. If it flies off, gently pick it up and put it back on your finger (you could be at this for a little while). I actually like to put them on my shoulder, cuddled under my hair (for those who don't have it, a towel over your head will work) for a little while. Spend 15-30 minutes a day and soon your bird will look forward to the attention. We will always be happy to show you with your bird if you have any questions. Please call ahead of time to make an appointment.

They love toys! Variety is important and different birds can have different tastes. Switch them out regularly and check them for stray strings or broken parts. They can get bored so change the toys and try new ones on occasion. You can always reintroduce older toys later and the bird will think it's a new one.

Housing & Bedding:

The cage should be large enough to allow the bird to spread its wings and move freely about the cage even with an assortment of toys. 12"x 14"x16" would be the absolute smallest and only if the bird is getting a lot of one-on-one attention from you outside of the cage. Bigger is always better! If you are getting more than one bird the cage MUST be bigger. Don't forget that they have a long tail. The cage should be placed in a well-lit, smoke-free, draft-free environment away from cats or dogs, outside of the kitchen and not in direct sunlight. Remember that they are very social and do not like to be away from the family.

Set up the cage the way you'll want it with the food, water and toys. We recommend a staggered arrangement of the perches. i.e.: the lowest ones towards the front on the lowest section of the cage close to the food dishes (this keeps the top wire of the cage attached to the bottom plastic base) and the next perch up on the next cross bar about four inches further back and at least four inches away from the back of the cage (this helps to prevent their tail from becoming frayed from rubbing against the back). If the seed cups have covers, remove them until the bird is comfortable and eating well. Initially it is helpful to put a millet spray on the side of the topmost perch and to cover up that half of the cage with a towel for a little security. Do not use newspapers on the bottom of the cage as the ink is toxic and it will discolor the bird and cage. We recommend using paper towels and changing daily. This way you can check their droppings each day. A change in their droppings can be the first sign of an illness. You can also use Carefresh® paper bedding, but it should be changed at least once a week. Most cages come with a grate at the bottom to prevent the birds from picking at food that has been polluted or from chewing on their own droppings, but the grate must be kept clean and can be difficult to remove from the cage. If you cannot keep it clean, just remove it, use paper towels and make sure to change the paper daily. We recommend using a 10% bleach solution (1 part bleach and 9 parts water) when cleaning the cage. Other cleaning products leave toxic residues. Always rinse thoroughly. This should be done at least once a week. Keep the box that we sent the bird home in to put the bird in when you clean its cage with this solution.

Place the bird very gently in the cage. The box we send the bird home in has an end marked for opening. Place this end up close to the door, have someone hold open the door and open the end into the cage. The bird will fly into the light. This is especially important if you have opted to not have the wings clipped. A scared bird in a new environment can hit a wall hard. Allow the bird 24-48 hours of quiet before beginning to handle. It is very important that he/she begin eating within 24 hours. If he/she does not begin to eat within this time PLEASE call us immediately! Birds do not store enough body fat to go for extended periods of time without eating and drinking.

Diet:

The bird should have fresh food and water available to it at all times. Use only filtered water and change daily. We recommend filtered water because birds are very susceptible to the additives in tap water and the bacteria that makes it through the system. If the bird is still on seed it should be freshened daily by cleaning out the empty hulls. Birds have been known to starve with a full dish of seed just because they couldn't see the seed under all of the empty hulls. Pellets should be replenished and fruits and veggies replaced. Here at the store we try to get all birds moved off of seed by mixing Zupreem® Fruit Blend pellets into their seed, eventually moving them off of seed entirely. Once they are solidly on the Zupreem® Fruit Blend pellets we will slowly move them onto either the Zupreem® Natural Blend, Lafabers® or Roudybush® pellets. Pellet diets are much healthier for your pet and can double their lifespan! Seeds are like eating cheesecake day in and day out. For more information refer to our information sheet "Feeding for a Healthier Bird".

Here is a list of foods that we feed to our cockatiels: Cockatiel diet, Zupreem®, Lafabers® or Roudybush® pellets, Crazy-corn® cooking mix, whole grain breads, oranges, apples, millet spray, cuttlebone, romaine lettuce, kale, collard greens and mustard greens. You will find many other suggestions in your book and our web page. Suggested reading: Barron's® "The New Cockatiel Handbook."

Heating & Lighting:

Cockatiels do not like to go below 68° F at night and can overheat at 90° F. If you are worried about temperatures please call us so we can help you. We also recommend covering the cage at night so the bird is not startled by car headlights flashing by or sudden cool drafts.

Birds generally do not require extra lighting other than the ambient light in the room, but it should be light during the day and dark at night to allow for a normal sleep and eating cycle. If you feel that your home is too dark your bird can benefit from UVB and UVA lighting designed for reptiles.

Health & Wellbeing:

It is very important to monitor your bird's eating habits and its droppings for any change. If you have just gotten your bird from us and you feel that the bird is not eating enough or the droppings are loose or that it is inactive in any way PLEASE call us immediately! We have a 2-week health guarantee on all of our pets. If you have had your bird longer, you are still welcome to call us with any questions. Act quickly! Birds by nature hide all signs of illness. By the time you notice a change, the situation can be very serious.

Also be aware of airborne toxins and fumes such as air fresheners, incense, fumes from household cleaners, neighbors spraying insecticide, fumes from home improvements such as new carpets, paint, glues, wood floor finishes, etc. For these reasons also we do not recommend leaving your bird alone for a weekend in a closed up home. If you purchased your bird from us, we do provide boarding accommodations. Just give us a call! Our favorite veterinarian is Dr. Obegi at Allpet Vet - 206-365-1102.