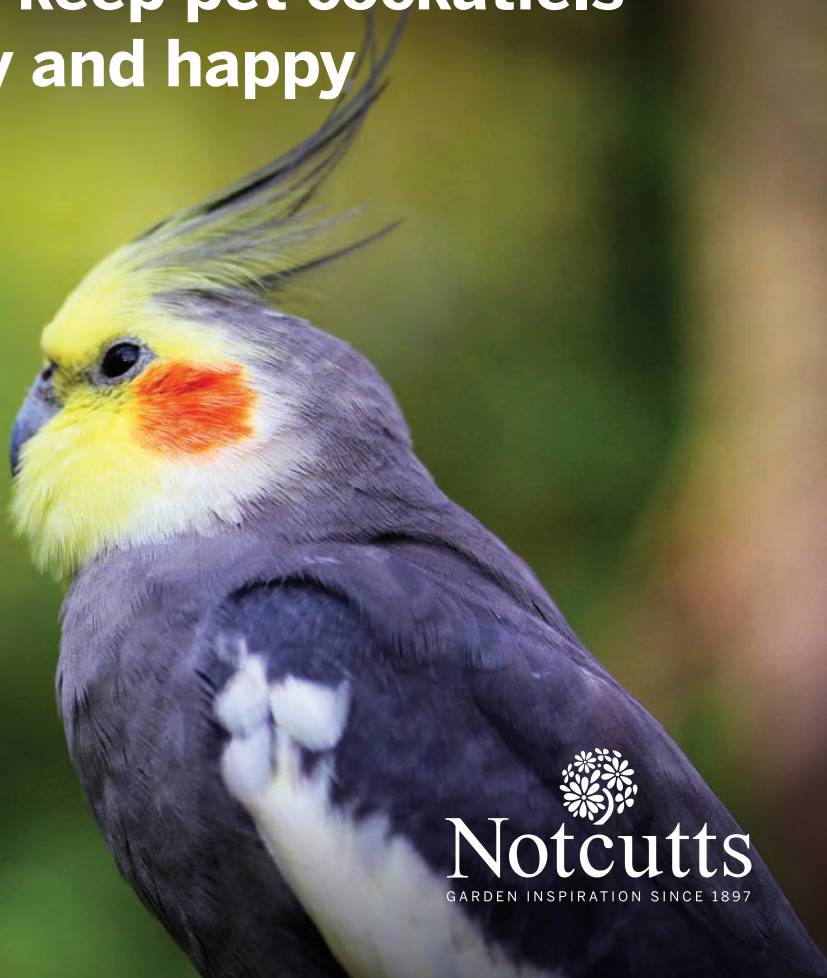


# Caring for your cockatiel

**How to keep pet cockatiels healthy and happy**



**Notcutts**

GARDEN INSPIRATION SINCE 1897

# Caring for your cockatiel



## Are cockatiels right for me?

Cockatiels are very popular as a first pet bird because they are easy to handle and care for as well as having lots of character. Young cockatiels can become very tame and some can be taught to whistle or even talk.

These happy, social and intelligent birds originally come from Australia and if looked after well, can live up to 25 years. They make great little companions and are suited to families. Due to their long lifetime, deciding to keep a cockatiel requires careful consideration.

Cockatiels are members of the parrot family and are known for their mellow, good nature. Grey is the most common colour but they can also come in pearl, white-faced, lutino, pied and other colour variations.

## Choosing a new pet cockatiel

When selecting your cockatiel, check these signs that he is healthy:

- Bright and alert
- Clear eyes and nostrils
- Clean vent
- Feathers flush to the body
- Steady breathing
- Active, free movement
- Firm beak with no cracks
- Healthy claws and feet

## The first few days

Your new bird's cage should be set up before you bring him home.

When you get home, carefully place him in the cage and leave him alone to adjust to his new surroundings.

When placed in his new cage, your cockatiel will start to explore, firstly to locate his food and water. If he's struggling, put a little seed on the floor of the cage to help him find the seed cups.

Millet sprays are good to have in his cage from the beginning, as they will settle him down while he gets used to his new environment.

## Creating a happy home

Cockatiels are happy in an outdoor aviary or an indoor cage.

If you're keeping your cockatiel in a cage, it should be as large as possible and a rectangular shape to allow maximum space for free flight.

When choosing where your cage should go, a draught-free position where there is a constant temperature is ideal. Avoid window sills as they can become very hot in the afternoon and cold at night. Kitchens are generally unsuitable because they can become hot or smoky.

In the evening, cover the cage with a thin sheet/towel as this will make your bird feel safe at night and protect him from draughts.

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Perches should have slightly different diameters (around 15mm) to exercise your bird's feet. Place them close to food and water with another one higher up for roosting.

Cockatiels need to preen to keep their feathers in good condition. They need a bird bath in their cage for a few hours when the room is warm, preferably early in the day when he has time to dry before night time. Alternatively, lightly spray him with a houseplant atomiser.

Aviaries should be in a sheltered position with adequate shade. As well as having a range of perches, your aviary should have a nestbox where birds can shelter and roost.

## A healthy diet and treats

Cockatiels need plenty of fresh water and it should be changed daily - twice a day in hot weather.

A healthy, varied diet would be:

- A mix of plain canary seed, millet and sunflower seeds form the basis of most cockatiel mixes. Grit must also be available to help proper digestion of the seed.
- Cockatiels enjoy fresh produce such as apple, orange, grapes, grated carrot and salad greens and also garden weeds such as chickweed, groundsel and dandelion. Always remove any fresh items from the cage after a few hours to prevent the cage becoming soiled. Never feed avocado or chocolate as these are poisonous to birds.

- A piece of cuttlefish bone will provide vital calcium and keep his beak well-trimmed.
- An iodine block will also supply necessary minerals.

Treat him now and then with millet spray and treat sticks to keep him busy while you are out of the house.

## Getting to know you

It can be very difficult to tame a cockatiel that has been bred in an aviary. To increase your chances, young cockatiels should be trained straight after the 48 hour settling in period.

Perch training is a good place to start. Try approaching the cage calmly with a spare perch held at one end. Slowly open the cage door and offer the perch level with your bird's chest so that he is encouraged to step up on it. Use a simple command at this point such as 'step up' and if he does it, reward him with a treat. However, if he doesn't step onto the perch, try again later in the day, and then the next day if he's reluctant.

Once your cockatiel comes to the perch, you can gradually introduce your finger, repeating the same command. When he is on your hand, keep your hand at around waist height. Avoid letting your bird sit on your shoulder as this will encourage him to dominate you.

Teaching a cockatiel to whistle or talk takes a lot of patience and some birds will never learn. Maintaining eye contact and constantly repeating one simple word (e.g.

his name) is a good way to start. Try to wait until this word has been mastered before attempting another word. Each training session should last no more than 20 minutes but can be repeated after an hour or so. Avoid keeping a mirror in the cage if you want to train your cockatiel to talk as he will end up talking to himself and therefore won't mimic you.

## Exercise your cockatiel needs

Cockatiels like to play to stop them getting too bored. Keep toys to a minimum (one or two) to allow your cockatiel maximum room to move around in the cage. Move the toys around occasionally or swap them to keep his interest.

It is important that your cockatiel comes out of his cage regularly. Ensure there are no fires or potential hazards and that any poisonous plants are removed. Dogs or cats should not be present while your bird is loose.



## Cockatiels and other pets

Cockatiels live happily in pairs, even if they are of the same sex, but should be introduced at an early age and at the same time. They are playful sociable characters and are happiest with company. They can be kept in a mixed aviary with other small parakeets of a similar size.

## Cockatiel gender

It's easy to tell the sex of a cockatiel after their first moult. Females retain a distinctive barred pattern across their tail feathers and tend to have duller facial markings. Males have an unmarked tail and tend to have brighter cheek pads and head crests.

Before the first moult it's very difficult to tell since young birds all look like female cockatiels.

## Potential health issues with cockatiels

### Feather plucking

This is quite common, especially in young lutino cockatiels. It usually happens when parents are keen to get rid of their first clutch of chicks to prepare for their second. It can also be caused by overcrowding or boredom. Once the situation is settled or rectified, feathers will normally grow back within a few weeks but if symptoms persist, seek veterinary advice.

### Egg binding

Occasionally eggs can become stuck in the egg tract and you may see the hen straining

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as she tries to lay the egg, your cockatiel should be taken to a vet straight away.

## Mites

Birds with feather mites will appear restless, more so at night when the mites are most active. They can also suffer from anemia due to the blood loss.

Treat the bird, cage and any nest boxes with a suitable mite spray but if the problem persists, seek veterinary advice.

## Pet insurance for your cockatiel

Cockatiels can be insured under plans for small birds, however, it may not be possible to find an insurance plan specifically tailored to cockatiels.

## Your new pet checklist

- Cage
- Sand sheets
- Grit
- Cuttlefish
- Mineral block
- Cockatiel seed mix
- Millet spray
- Bird bath
- Toys
- Cage cover
- Cage wipe and disinfectant
- Vitamins



# Help and further advice

If you have any questions about caring for your pet, our fully trained team are happy to help if they can, or advise on where to find more specialist information.

Whilst there is a wealth of information available online, only a professional will be able to correctly answer your query. If in doubt, call your local vet for an appointment.

It is against the law to release, or allow to escape, non-native animals or birds. If you have trouble caring for any animals contact our team for advice.



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