

*Bird Health Notes:*



# **CHOOSING A COCKATOO**

## General information

The Cockatoo (family *Cacatuidae*) is a large bodied parrot with a crest of feathers on top of the head that stands erect when the bird is alarmed or excited. These natives of main land Australia and surrounding islands are most widely treasured as desirable companions because of their intelligence and incredibly affectionate nature. They are a suitable family pet as long as it is appreciated they can be like having a small child - forever! *This is a high maintenance bird both physically and emotionally as they demand a lot of attention.* They enjoy endless coddling, caressing and hugs. Without adequate attention, Cockatoos sometimes become excessively boisterous and potentially destructive if incorrectly socialised. This may lead to profound possessiveness towards owners, misguided aggressiveness and feather picking.

This beautiful bird is not as talented a talker as other parrots. It has a loud, harsh, penetrating voice that may indicate joy or outrage. When alarmed or frightened, Cockatoos give off a peculiar hissing noise as a warning. Cockatoos love to chew, therefore, providing a continuous supply of non-toxic fresh branches and pet-safe toys will afford many hours of entertainment for your bird. Cockatoos naturally produce a lot of feather dust or powder down from their feathers.

Some commonly kept Cockatoos include the larger Moluccan (Salmon-crested) Cockatoo, Greater Sulfur-crested Cockatoo and Umbrella (White) Cockatoo. The smaller sized birds include the Goffin's Cockatoo, Lesser Sulfur-crested Cockatoo and the Citron-crested Cockatoo.

## **Purchasing a Cockatoo**

Cockatoos may be purchased from a pet shop or, better, a reputable breeder. When selecting a Cockatoo, try to choose a young bird as it may be easier to tame and train. Older, wild, colony or parent raised birds may prove difficult to tame. Hand raised babies often make better pets since they have been completely socialised with humans. Young birds are easier to tame and adapt readily to new environments and situations. Importantly having a captive-bred bird also means that the wild bird population is not threatened further by catching and importing wild birds. This practice is bad both for the bird captured and transported as well as for the dwindling population left in the wild. Your new bird should be exposed early to different events (young and old people, males and females, other pets, car trips, visits to the vet, etc.) to help promote a calm, well adjusted pet. The lively, alert bird that is not easily frightened is more likely a healthy bird. After purchasing your new bird, have it examined by your vet.

## **Veterinary care**

Cockatoos require regular, routine veterinary health check-ups. Your veterinary surgeon can perform a physical examination, grooming (beak, nail or feather trim ) and laboratory tests as needed. During these semi-annual check-ups, health, nutritional and maintenance issues can be identified and addressed. Veterinary check-ups help prevent disease and will aid in the maintenance of a long lasting, healthy relationship between you and your bird.

## Colour

### Mature

- the main colour is white and depending on the species, various shades of yellow, pink and orange
- a few are dark grey to black
- legs are dark grey

### Immature

- similar to the adult

## Sexing

### Mature

- generally have few external differences
- mature females of some species have a reddish brown eye (iris)
- males generally have a dark brown or almost black eye

### Immature

- no reliable external sex differences

**Weight:** average 10 - 30 ounces (300 - 900 grams) depending on the species

**Size:** average 12 - 27 inches (31 - 70 cm) in length

**Life span:** 25 - 45 years (maximum 85 years)

**Diet:** consult your vet or see the diet sheet in this series

**Breeding:** sexual maturity for smaller species is 2 years, for medium species 3 - 4 years, for larger species 5 - 6 years. Can be challenging to breed successfully depending on the species

**Brood size:** 1 - 8 whitish eggs hatch in 17 - 31 days, young leave the nest in 6-9 weeks

**Cage:** minimum 3 ft x 3 ft x 4 ft (90 cm x 90 cm x 120 cm) need a very strong sturdy cage to withstand the powerful beaks