

Cockatiels – One of the Most Unlikely Cuddly Pets

If you've never owned one, you might question how this pet can be 'cuddly.' But she does thrive on human attention and will let you know how she's feeling. Here's what to watch for when she wants to cuddle and play — and the signs when she doesn't.

Reviewed by Dr. Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Cockatiels are a favorite pet bird all over the world. Often called simply “tiels” in the U.S., in their native Australia, the birds are also called quarrions and weiros
- An outstanding feature of cockatiels is their erectable head crest, which stands tall when they are excited or startled, is slightly tilted when the birds are relaxed, and is flattened to the head when a tiel is feeling angry or defensive
- Cockatiels aren't as talkative as other parrot species, but with enough time and training, you can teach one certain words and phrases
- Male cockatiels are nurturing, protective parents fully capable of taking mom's place if necessary
- If you aren't home all day, it's best to get your cockatiel another companion as they're very social

Editor's Note: This article is a reprint. It was originally published February 14, 2015.

Cockatiels Are Parrots



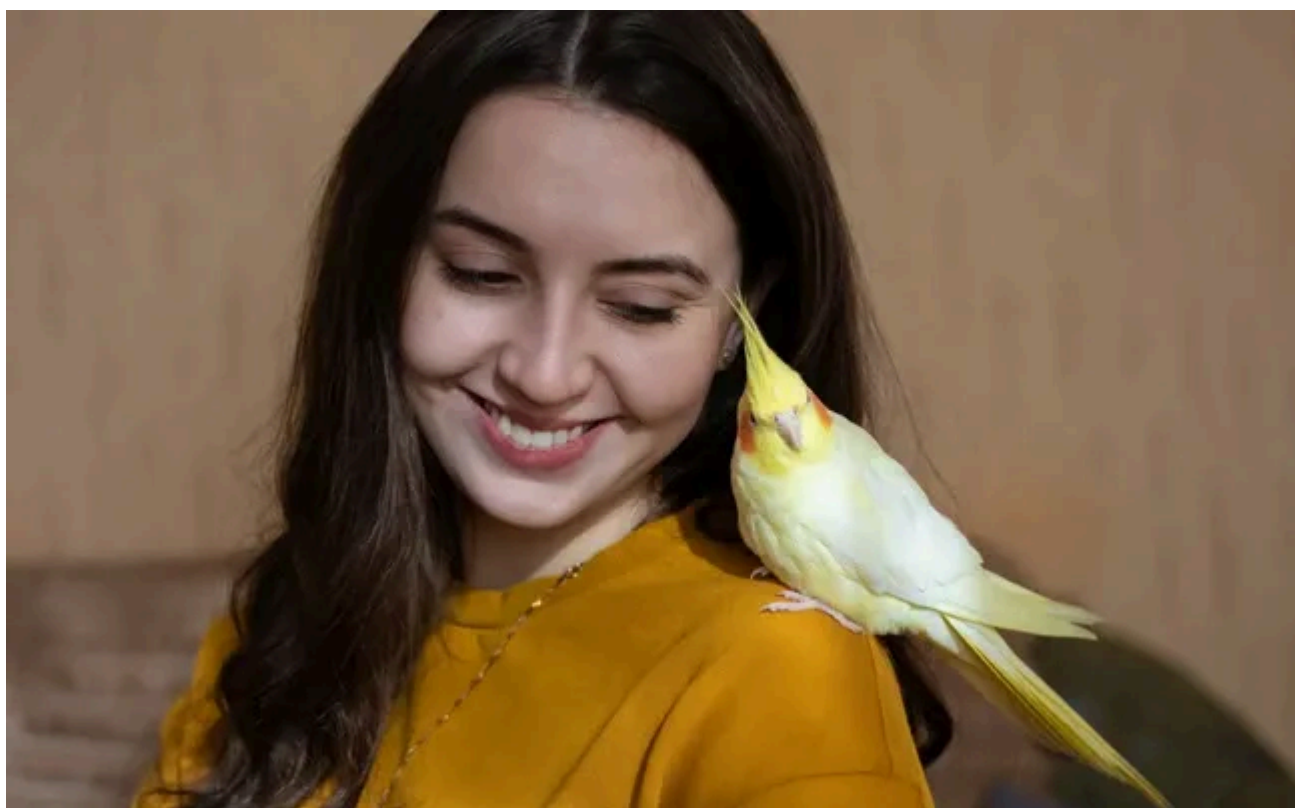
The cockatiel (*Nymphicus hollandicus*), like all parrots, has a curved hookbill and zygodactyl feet (two toes point forward and two point backward). These little parrots are native to Australia and are close relatives of the cockatoo. In the wild they are found in Australian wetlands, scrublands, and bush lands.

Cockatiels are sociable and generally gentle, and are kept as family pets and companion parrots throughout the world. They are often referred to simply as “tiels” in the U.S. In Australia, they are also called quarriors or weiros.

The average lifespan of a cockatiel in captivity is 15 to 20 years, and there are reports of some birds living as long as 30 years.

Cockatiels are bred in captivity in the U.S. There are many bird rescue organizations nationwide if you’re interested in adopting a cockatiel that needs a home.

Cockatiels Can Learn to Say Words and Phrases



Cockatiels aren't the talkers other parrot species are, but if you're willing to put in the time, you can teach your bird to mimic a number of words and phrases. Male cockatiels are more likely to talk than females.

Cockatiels are typically quite vocal when they awake in the morning and at bedtime. They also tend to noisily greet their humans when they come home.

Cockatiels Have Erectable Crests



Like certain cockatoos, the cockatiel has an erectable pointed crest that stands up when he's excited or startled, is slightly tilted when he's feeling relaxed, and is flattened to his head when he's angry or defensive.

Also like cockatoos, tiels have facial feathers covering the sides of their beaks. However, cockatiels have long tail feathers unlike most cockatoos. In fact, their tails make up half their body length. Tiels average from 12.5 to 13 inches in length including the tail. A healthy adult can weigh from 2 to 4.5 ounces.

Traditionally, cockatiel plumage is a medium grey color, lighter underneath, with orange cheek patches and a white blaze on the wings. Females have a line of yellow-colored spots underneath the wings, but males do not. The Lutino tiel is a light yellow color, and females have barred tail feathers. Captive breeding programs have created a number of other variants.

Male Cockatiels Are Great Parents



Male cockatiels are nurturing, affectionate parents and are capable of raising their newborns if the mother is unable to. In the wild, male cockatiels will face down much larger birds and predators to keep their family safe.

Cockatiels reach sexual maturity at 12 to 24 months. Females lay from 5 to 10 eggs, with an incubation period of 17 to 24 days. Chicks are weaned at about 8 weeks.

Cockatiels Need Company



Cockatiels are very social birds and need lots of interaction with either their humans or another bird friend. If you aren't home during the day, it's best to get two tiels as youngsters so they can keep each other company.

Cockatiels Can Be Cuddly Pets



If you spend quality time with your tiel and earn her trust, she'll be a very affectionate pet. Tiels like to sit on their human's shoulder, and play with their hair or sample their jewelry. Female cockatiels are known to be especially friendly and easy-going.

Cockatiels are also good at letting their humans know how they're feeling. If your tiel wants to interact with you, she'll likely jump to the front of her cage as you approach. But if she refuses to budge from her perch or even hisses at you, she's telling you she's not in the mood. Happy cockatiels tend to break out in song, and enjoy admiring their reflection in a mirror.

How to Tell a Male from a Female Cockatiel by Looking



It's difficult to determine the sex of a cockatiel before the first molt at around 6 to 9 months. That's when their adult coloring appears. Grey tiels are easy to sex once they have their adult plumage. Males have bright yellow faces and dark grey bodies. Female faces are grey with touches of pale yellow, and their bodies are a duller grey than the males.

Also, after the molt the female's tail will retain a barring pattern on the underside, but the underside of the male's tail will be a solid grey color.

Other color varieties of cockatiels, such as albino, cinnamon, Lutino, pearl, and pied, are more difficult to sex than the grey bird, but males typically have brighter orange cheek feathers.

Personality Differences Between Male and Female Cockatiels



If you're still not sure whether your cockatiel is a boy or a girl, there are other clues you can look for. Males are much more vocal and tend to whistle; females are typically fairly quiet, but when they do vocalize, they tend to scream. Females are more likely to hiss and bite.

Males strut by lifting their wings slightly, puffing out their chest, and parading around. Also, if there's a mirror available, a male will spend lots of time in front of it performing, whereas females lose interest quickly.

Cockatiels Can Have Nightmares



Cockatiels are prone to "night frights." Something startles them, and they start flapping their wings in distress. It could be a moving shadow or car lights. Night frights typically occur as the bird is falling asleep. It's important to comfort your tiel if this happens, and spend a few minutes petting him until he calms down.

Providing a night light in your bird's dark room and closing the shades to reduce shadows may help.

Cockatiels frequently injure their wings during night frights. If you see blood from a damaged blood feather, you'll need to stop the bleeding immediately. All bird owners should keep styptic powder on hand for emergencies. Apply the powder to the bleeding feather and apply gentle pressure for several minutes, while keeping your bird securely swaddled in a soft towel.

Cockatiels Need Big Cages



Despite her relatively small size, your cockatiel needs a nice roomy cage, big enough to accommodate multiple perches, toys, food bowls, and plenty of space for safe wing flapping. A large front door is ideal — it will make returning your bird to her cage much easier.

Tiels are ground foragers in the wild and will forage on the bottom of their cage if given the opportunity. Cover the cage floor with newspaper and add some crumbled treats or sprinkle seed for your bird to find.

Sources and References

[Bird Channel, Top 10 Cockatiel Questions Answered \(Archived\)](#)

[Cockatiel.com](#)

[Beauty of Birds](#)

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