

# COCKATOOS



Companion Bird Care  
**SERIES**

## Most Common Disorders of Cockatoos

- Behavioral problems (screaming, biting)
- Feather destructive behavior
- Anti-social behavior, including aggression towards other birds
- Self mutilation
- Cloacal prolapse
- Pododermatitis
- Obesity
- Lipomas
- Fungal and bacterial infections
- Viral infections, such as Psittacine beak and feather disease, and Proventricular dilatation disease
- Reproductive disease, especially female birds

Many diseases can be prevented with regular veterinary care, proper diet and housing. For these reasons, it is important to develop a relationship with a veterinarian who is experienced in avian preventive care, medicine and surgery. For help in finding an avian veterinarian in your area, contact the Association of Avian Veterinarians (AAV) by visiting [www.AAV.org](http://www.AAV.org) and click on “Find a Vet near you” or the American Board of Veterinary Practitioners, [www.ABVP.com/diplomate](http://www.ABVP.com/diplomate).

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*C*ockatoos are native to Australia, New Zealand and South Pacific islands. Most free-ranging species are considered threatened or endangered, and efforts to protect these birds have resulted in a ban on importation for pet purposes in the United States. High quality companion birds are available from breeders. The “white” species (eg, umbrella, sulphur-crested, citron) are in high demand because they are such good quality companion birds. However, they are also notorious for behavioral problems, including feather destructive and self-mutilation behavior, screaming, biting, and aggression. The personalities of cockatoos range from the “reserved” demeanor of the Moluccan to the comical and playful corella. All are interactive and highly intelligent birds, requiring proper socialization, significant mental stimulation, and opportunities to carry out their natural behaviors. They love attention and can be taught to perform tricks.

## What to Expect from Your Cockatoo

 Cockatoos are charming and interesting pets, however they require a great deal of time and effort, and are naturally noisy and destructive. Noise levels make them poor choices for apartments and smaller dwellings. Cockatoos have a well-deserved reputation for being “cuddly,” and are often marketed with this attribute in mind. However, this characteristic is also often the source of objectionable behavior problems as the bird matures. Intimate petting and cuddling is often interpreted by mature birds as mating behavior and results in chronic hormone stimulation, and a host of potential behavioral problems. Cockatoo owners should educate themselves on ways to encourage social

behaviors, with techniques such as target training, positive reinforcement and foraging.

Cockatoos have some capacity to mimic, but their voice is not as clear as other parrots. Most cockatoo species produce abundant powder down, which is shed as feather dust in the cage and on furniture and clothing, and is found circulating in the air. The feather dust may cause respiratory disorders in susceptible individuals or other birds. A high quality air purifier is recommended for the home.

### Is Your Cockatoo a Male or a Female?

In most cockatoo species, the gender can be determined by the color of the iris: in adult males it is usually dark brown, and in adult females it is light brown or reddish brown. However, this does not hold completely true in all individuals; therefore, endoscopy or laboratory methods may be desired to confirm the gender.

### What Should You Feed Your Cockatoo?

For a long, healthy life, cockatoos should be fed a high quality, toxin-free formulated diet. Supplementation may include small amounts of chopped organic vegetables and fruit and whole grains.

### What Do Cockatoos Do All Day?

Most cockatoos are playful and can be amused with simple toys. Toys must be sturdy and free of toxic metals, hooks, sharp objects and easily consumed components. Social interactions with multiple human individuals as well as foraging and problem-solving opportunities may help keep a cockatoo mentally stimulated. Large diameter fresh-cut branches from nontoxic, pesticide-free trees should be available. Check with your veterinarian for recommendations of available safe trees.

### Are Cockatoos Tame?

Young, hand-raised cockatoos adapt readily to new surroundings and handling procedures. They should be exposed early in life to novel situations (car travel, hospital visits, multiple visitors in the household, other household pets) so that they are well adjusted to these events. Lifelong positive reinforcement, leadership, patience and consistency are essential for the prevention of serious behavioral problems in the future.

### How to Identify your Bird

Cockatoos occasionally escape outdoors, and permanent identification may help to return birds to their owners. One method used to permanently identify your bird is implantation of a microchip, as is performed in other pets. Some birds already have leg bands for identification. Although closed leg bands seldom cause injury, some owners prefer to have them removed.

### Should the Wings Be Clipped?

The decision to clip wings or allow free flight should be made carefully. Birds allowed free flight benefit from exercise and mental stimulation; however, free flying birds may be injured by hitting windows or ceiling fans or hurt by encountering toxic materials. With careful planning and training, some birds may be allowed free flight in a safe area. The goal of clipping the wings is not to make the bird incapable of flight but to prevent it from developing rapid and sustained flight and to prevent escape. Clipping must be done carefully and tailored to each individual to prevent flight and injuries from falling.

## How to Keep Your Cockatoo Healthy, Happy and Safe!

- ✓ Take your cockatoo to your veterinarian immediately after purchase, then once annually for examinations.
  - ✓ Provide stimulating environmental enrichment by offering toys, social interaction and foraging opportunities.
  - ✓ Feed a fresh, high quality, toxin-free formulated diet with fresh chopped fruits, vegetables and whole grains according to the manufacturer’s recommendation.
  - ✓ Provide clean, fresh uncontaminated drinking water and change frequently. Cockatoos can be trained to use a water bottle.
  - ✓ Many birds enjoy bathing. Try providing a warm water bath, or gently spraying with clean warm water daily if possible.
  - ✓ Avoid spraying house with insecticides.
- Housing for your cockatoo should:
- ✓ be as large as possible.
  - ✓ be clean, secure and safe.
  - ✓ be constructed of nontoxic materials (some cages may contain toxic metals, such as zinc).

- ✓ contain variable-sized perches made of clean, nontoxic, pesticide-free wood or branches.
- ✓ have easy-to-clean food and water containers.
- ✓ have perches not placed directly over food or water bowls.
- ✓ offer opportunities for protected outdoor exposure to fresh air, direct sunlight and exercise.

## What Your Veterinarian Looks for in a Healthy Cockatoo



Clear, bright eyes  
(no discharge)

Smooth, bright  
feathers that are not ragged,  
discolored or broken

Dry, open  
nares

Smooth  
beak

Good body  
condition

Alert, erect  
posture

Even pattern  
of skin on the feet, nails of  
appropriate length

Cockatoos are very curious and will investigate anything new in their environment. That is why it is important to prevent their access to:

- ✗ ceiling fans
- ✗ stove tops with hot burners, pans or skillets
- ✗ fumes from overheated non-stick cookware
- ✗ sandpaper-covered perches
- ✗ tobacco and cigarette smoke
- ✗ chocolate, avocado, salt, alcohol
- ✗ toxic houseplants
- ✗ pesticides or chemical cleaners
- ✗ easily dismantled toys
- ✗ dogs, cats and unsupervised children
- ✗ sources of heavy metals, such as lead or zinc (stained glass windows, pewter, some mini-blinds or linoleum)
- ✗ plug-in air fresheners
- ✗ scented candles