

Cockatiel Disease

Can cockatiels and cockatoos live in the same room?

Q: I have a question about having different types of birds in the same room, in different cages, of course. I have an 11-year-old cockatiel in one cage, a 1 ½ year old Mexican red-headed Amazon in a larger cage and, on other side of room, we had a 7-month-old Goffin's cockatoo. The cockatoo died all of a sudden, we were heart broken to say the least. We are seniors and these birds are like children to us. Someone said we cannot have cockatiels and cockatoos in same room – as cockatiels carry a disease. Is that true? We truly miss our baby cockatoo.

Linda S. Rubin explains:

First, allow me to say how very deeply sorry I am to hear of the loss of your Goffin's cockatoo. Losing any companion bird we care for, whether for a short period of time or a beloved pet of many years, is a heart-wrenching experience, especially when we consider them members of our family.

To say it succinctly, no member of the parrot family, including cockatiels, ordinarily harbors disease. However, any avian species may contract disease or shed some illnesses if exposed to them, which is why it is necessary to quarantine any new bird you plan to add to your household – whether it is only one other bird, or an entire flock.

Avian veterinarians recommend a 90-day quarantine period – or a minimum of 30 days at the very least – housing new arrivals in a separate air space from existing birds. Many illnesses are airborne, so it is safer to board new birds, off premises from other birds. You can keep a new bird at a neighbor's, friend's or relatives home, or in another area of the house if it has a separate air system. Watch birds closely during quarantine to make certain they do not exhibit disease.

Illness in birds can be sudden and difficult to detect, therefore, take any newly acquired bird to an experienced avian veterinarian for a health check. If illness is detected, a bird may be prescribed the correct medication and rechecked to be certain treatment is effective. Once a bird finishes medication, undergoes a recheck and completes a new schedule of quarantine (beginning after medication is completed), the treated bird can be introduced to the aviary or bird room. Although it may initially sound expensive, it is a safer and less costly expense in the long-run than risking the health of other birds.

It is likely that your Goffin's cockatoo may have been ill initially, because you've had your other birds far longer. You did not mention exactly when you lost your Goffin's, but you should bring your other birds to an avian veterinarian for a health check to determine whether they were exposed to anything that affected your Goffin's.

Because cockatiels are sweet, gentle birds by nature and your red-headed Amazon has a larger and much more dangerous beak, you must supervise the daily interaction you allow your birds. A cockatiel landing on an Amazon's cage, or an Amazon landing on your cockatiel's cage, can result in dangerous, life-threatening injuries through the cage bars. Although parrots of different species can pair bond with one another, it would be unusual for a cockatiel to bond with an Amazon; I recommend proceeding with caution to be certain that the Amazon does not injure the cockatiel, which is effectively, defenseless.