

Top 10 Pet Cockatoo Parrot Questions Answered

Have a question about your pet cockatoo? Check the BirdChannel.com pet cockatoo parrot FAQ for answers!

By BirdChannel.com Editors

Moluccan cockatoo courtesy Karen Kall, Illinois

Top 10 Pet Cockatoo Question #1

What kind of cockatoo parrot do I have?

Several cockatoo parrots are commonly kept as pets. The species can be divided between the large cockatoo parrots and the small. Popular large pet cockatoos include the umbrella (*Cacatua alba*), Moluccan (*C. moluccensis*) and sulphur-crested cockatoos.

The sulphur-crested cockatoos comprise multiple species: the lesser sulphur-crest (*C. sulphurea*); the citron (*C. s. citrinocristata*); the greater sulphur crest (*C. galerita*); the medium sulphur-crest or eleonora (*C. g. eleonora*); and the triton (*C. g. triton*).

Smaller cockatoo parrots include the bare eye (*C. sanguinea*), rose breast (*Eolophus roseicapillus*) and Goffin's (*C. goffini*).

Some of the lesser known cockatoos include the slender-billed corella (*C. tenuirostris*) and Leadbeater's cockatoo (*Lophochroa leadbeateri*). Top 10 Pet Cockatoo Question #2

What should my cockatoo parrot eat?

Feed pet cockatoos a formulated-food-based diet (e.g. pellets). Supplement this with fresh fruit and vegetables and the occasional nut or seed treat in its diet. Save treats for training, which can be excellent motivational tools to teach your pet cockatoo tricks. Encourage pet cockatoos to try new foods by creating foraging opportunities. In the wild, pet cockatoo parrots forage for seeds and nuts on the ground.

Umbrella cockatoo courtesy Jennifer Yost, Ohio

Greater sulphur-crested cockatoo courtesy Sandi Gagneaux, Mississippi

Top 10 Pet Cockatoo Question #3

What kind of pet bird cage should I get for my cockatoo parrot?

As with any pet parrot, buy the biggest pet bird cage possible that you can accommodate and afford. Experts recommend a minimum 24-inch-deep by 36-inch-wide cage for a smaller cockatoo parrot, such as the Goffin's, and a minimum 30-inch-deep by 48-inch-wide cage for the larger cockatoo parrots like umbrellas and Moluccans. Stock this pet bird cage with engaging bird toys to encourage independent play and alleviate boredom. Top 10 Pet Cockatoo Question #4

Is my cockatoo parrot male or female?

Some cockatoo parrots display sexual dimorphism (i.e., visible distinctions between the sexes). These slight variations differ from species to species. Scientists note one frequent, subtle distinction that occurs in multiple species – females' irises are often brownish or reddish brown when compared to the black of the males. Again, this can be so subtle, so a DNA test is recommended for accuracy.

Goffin's cockatoo courtesy Robbyn & Andrew Foster, California

Bare-eyed cockatoo by Cioli & Hunnicutt/BowTie Studio/Courtesy Linda Buesching

Top 10 Pet Cockatoo Question #5

What's the best way to train my cockatoo parrot?

Engaging your cockatoo in enjoyable interaction a little bit everyday can provide the stability it needs to learn tricks and acceptable behavior. Training can mean learning tricks or simply refer to encouraging a socially acceptable pet bird.

Top 10 Pet Cockatoo Question #6

What should I get my pet cockatoo parrot to make it happy?

As larger parrots, cockatoos enjoy using their large beaks to manipulate and shred items, such as toys. Some experts suggest that large toys and branches to chew on will distract pet birds that might otherwise feather pick. Pine cones, safe branches and twigs that have been sterilized are natural solutions to assist the chewing instinct. Foraging activities are also fun for pet cockatoos.

Rose-breasted cockatoo by Cioli & Hunnicutt/Bowtie Studio/Courtesy Pollu Porter

Ducorp's cockatoo courtesy Debbie Lesh, South Carolina

Top 10 Pet Cockatoo Question #7

Do cockatoo parrots talk?

Yes, many cockatoo parrots mimic human speech, as well as household sounds and whistles. Cockatoos respond to positive reinforcement and interaction. Encourage your pet cockatoo to talk. Like most parrot species, a cockatoo's talking ability varies from bird to bird, so some cockatoos simply will stick to their own language when speaking.

As with many parrots, pet cockatoos can develop screaming issues. If your pet cockatoo starts to scream excessively, work with your pet bird to discourage it.

Top 10 Pet Cockatoo Question #8

Do cockatoo parrots contract certain diseases?

Some diseases that might concern pet cockatoo owners include aspergillosis, a fungal disease that often affects the respiratory system, and sarcosporidiosis, an emaciating disease contracted through the droppings of wild animals such as opossums. Both can be avoided by keeping birds indoors. Another disease that can strike is Psittacine beak and feather disease (PBFD), which is caused by a circovirus that attacks the cells of the immune system and cells that produce the beak and feathers. You can ward off most diseases by following prevention measures. Quarantine new pet birds for five weeks or more, feed a good diet, reduce stress and keep your pet bird's cage clean.

Citron cockatoo by Christopher Diez, California

Slender-billed corella

Top 10 Pet Cockatoo Question #9

How can I tell if my pet cockatoo is sick?

Keep an eye on pet cockatoos' health. When changing cage lining, become familiar with your pet cockatoo's normal droppings. Note distinct changes and provide your avian veterinarian with this information. Pet cockatoo owners should also watch food and water intake, which is another way keep an eye on their pet cockatoo's health. Finally, and critically, keep an eye on feather health and watch out for any feather picking or self-mutilation. Note what changes might have preceded this behavior, and inform your avian veterinarian immediately.

Top 10 Pet Cockatoo Question #10

Can cockatoo parrots have behavior concerns?

As very intelligent birds, cockatoo parrots seek mental stimulation frequently. Cockatoo owners must interact with their birds daily, through at least an hour of interactive play, and teach their pet birds independent play for times when the owner is not present. "Cuddly" cockatoo parrots can become confused when reaching sexual maturity. Cockatoos can mistake physical affection, especially petting along the lower back, for breeding behavior and bite or misbehave out of frustration. This leads previously friendly pet cockatoos to become nippy, causing owners to interact with them less and consequently they neglect these now emotionally-needy birds. Such birds can exhibit their stress through feather picking. (Feather picking can also result from some physical illnesses.) Experts recommend replacing cuddle time with play sessions to discourage this neediness.

Leadbeater's cockatoo (aka Major Mitchell's cockatoo)

Budgie FAQ
Conure FAQ

Cockatiel FAQ
African Grey FAQ
Macaw FAQ