Cockatiel

Meet your bird

Your long-term companion



Companion birds are individuals, not interchangeable decorations. Their health and behavior depend on the housing, food, opportunity to move, environmental safety, and consistent human care you can offer over years. This handbook is a practical starting point for planning, not a substitute for advice from a qualified avian veterinarian.

Write down why this species appeals to you, how much daily time you can reliably provide, who will care for the bird during travel, and what you will do when the bird becomes older or needs veterinary attention. A good match should work on an ordinary busy weekday, not just on the day you bring the bird home.

Cockatiel

Before you adopt or buy

Make a responsible decision

Ask for the bird's age or approximate age, source, diet history, medical records, previous living conditions, and any behavior concerns. Ask whether it is fully independently eating. Never take home a bird that still requires hand-feeding unless you are an appropriately trained professional. If possible, observe the bird eating, moving, vocalizing, and interacting at its own pace.

Verify relevant state and municipal rules, landlord restrictions, and species-specific legal requirements. Obtain a written transfer record and schedule an initial examination with a veterinarian experienced in birds. Consider rescue and ethical rehoming as well as reputable breeders.

QUESTIONS FOR THE SELLER

Is the bird fully weaned and eating independently? What is the current food and weight? Has it had an avian-vet exam, and are records available? ? Can I see the bird's hatch or estimated-age record, origin information, diet notes and any veterinary or disease-test documentation? What support is available after transfer? ? What cage, perches, toys and routine has the bird used? What situations cause fear, calling, biting or conflict with other birds?

Cockatiel

Species profile

Temperament and household fit



Notice how the bird responds to change and to people. Some individuals are outgoing and curious while others are watchful or easily startled. Do not assume that a bird of a commonly friendly species will automatically enjoy touching, shoulder time, or learning words.

A family should agree beforehand on who will prepare food, clean the enclosure, supervise exercise, and notice health changes. Children can help with observation and simple chores when guided by an adult, but adults remain responsible for safety and veterinary decisions.

NOTES FROM THE SPECIES PROFILE

02 | Cockatiel APPA's 2025 survey: second most common type; ownership increased in the survey | Small cockatoo-family companion TEMPERAMENT / ACTIVITY HOUSEHOLD FIT Often whistles and interacts with people; some are shy or vocal. A crest and body posture can help signal comfort or alarm. A household able to provide routine, gentle handling and daily activity. Plan for powdery feather dust and household sensitivity; do not assume every bird wants to be cuddled. Personality and daily interaction Often gentle and whistle-oriented, but can be wary and may call for company.

Housing and cage

Room for healthy movement

Choose the largest safe enclosure the home can support, prioritizing horizontal room and natural movement. Bar spacing must match the bird's head size and ability to squeeze through; ask an avian veterinarian or qualified avian housing specialist to confirm the exact model. An enclosure is not a replacement for species-appropriate movement or exercise.

Place it in a comfortable room with natural day-night cues, away from smoke, kitchen fumes, direct drafts, overheating, and chaotic traffic. Make sure food, water and resting perches are accessible without forcing the bird to stand under droppings.

SPECIES HOUSING NOTES

Space: Use a roomy flight cage with horizontal movement, safe perches and covered rest at night as advised by a vet. Provide supervised exercise, foraging and chew toys. ? Routine: Introduce bathing and grooming gradually. Watch for changes in droppings, appetite, breathing or energy; birds may hide illness. Keep away from cooking fumes and aerosols.

Perches and enrichment

An environment worth exploring

Use several bird-safe perches with varied natural textures and diameters rather than identical smooth rods. Keep landing areas clear, check rope products for loose fibers, and remove damaged accessories. Do not rely on abrasive perch covers to replace proper nail care.

Rotate a small number of safe toys regularly: shredding, foraging, manipulable objects and opportunities to search for food. Supervise novel items at first and remove any that introduce entanglement, sharp edges, loose metal parts, or swallowed fragments.

ACTIVITY AND ENRICHMENT

Often gentle and whistle-oriented, but can be wary and may call for company.

Cockatiel

Feeding fundamentals

Build a balanced routine

Ask an avian veterinarian to help choose a species-appropriate formulated diet and fresh foods. Requirements differ among parrots, finches, canaries and doves; there is no single universal diet. Seed-only feeding is commonly inadequate for many pet parrots, and sudden diet changes may cause a bird to stop eating.

Introduce unfamiliar foods gradually, monitor actual intake, and weigh the bird only as taught by your veterinarian. Never guess at supplements or vitamin dosing. Chocolate, caffeine, alcohol and avocado are among foods that must be kept away from companion birds.

NOTES FROM THE SPECIES PROFILE

Provide supervised exercise, foraging and chew toys. - Routine: Introduce bathing and grooming gradually. Watch for changes in droppings, appetite, breathing or energy; birds may hide illness. Keep away from cooking fumes and aerosols. Food and water Use a complete cockatiel/parrot formulated diet with vegetables; seeds should not be the whole diet. Keep fresh water available. Make diet changes gradually with avian-vet advice; never add vitamins, supplements or grit automatically. Household safety and activity Provide a predictable sleep and bathing routine and room to move. Feather dust and household fumes matter; keep cats and dogs separated during flight time.

Water, cleaning, and hygiene

Small habits that protect health

Replace drinking water every day and sooner if it becomes dirty. Wash food and water dishes with bird-safe methods and rinse thoroughly. Remove perishable fresh food before it spoils. Use a simple notebook to record daily appetite, activity and unusual droppings.

Spot-clean soiled surfaces daily and perform a deeper enclosure clean routinely, using products your avian veterinarian confirms are safe. Avoid strong fragrance, aerosols, nonstick cookware fumes and cleaning products that release irritating vapors near the bird.

FOOD AND DAILY ROUTINE

Use a complete cockatiel/parrot formulated diet with vegetables; seeds should not be the whole diet. Keep fresh water available. Make diet changes gradually with avian-vet advice; never add vitamins, supplements or grit automatically.

Social needs and training

Trust through choice and patience



Positive reinforcement and patience build trust. Start with short predictable sessions: reward calm attention, a small step toward a perch, or a voluntary step-up. End before frustration rises and never grab, punish, or force touch to make progress.

Birds communicate with posture, distance and movement. A bird leaning away, freezing, lunging or avoiding a hand may be asking for more space. Respecting that choice today often improves handling tomorrow. Training goals may include calmly entering a carrier and returning to the enclosure.

Daily routine and sleep

Predictability without boredom

Offer a consistent pattern of meals, light, rest, supervised activity and calm interaction. Many companion birds need a substantial uninterrupted dark, quiet sleep period; the precise schedule should fit the species and veterinary recommendations.

Plan for daytime movement and mental engagement, especially when household members work or attend school. A radio, mirror or unattended toy is not a substitute for species-appropriate social interaction. Never leave loose birds unsupervised with open windows, fans or other animals.

Cockatiel

Veterinary care

Establish an avian-vet relationship

Locate an avian veterinarian before an emergency. Arrange a baseline exam soon after acquisition and ask how often your particular bird should be seen thereafter. Bring records about age, diet, housing, weight trends and previous medical issues.

Ask specifically about nutrition, parasite or disease testing when indicated, feather and skin condition, beak and nail care, reproductive health, and preventive follow-up. Pet birds do not share a universal vaccination schedule; vaccines may be appropriate only for particular species, diseases or exposure risks.

NOTES FROM THE SPECIES PROFILE

Cockatiel | Health and home plan Prepare the home first and arrange an avian veterinarian before the bird arrives. Veterinary and safety checklist - Book a baseline visit with an avian veterinarian soon after the bird arrives. Bring all records and ask about exam, weight, nutrition, disease testing and follow-up timing. - Ask how to recognize changes in appetite, droppings, breathing, posture, balance, feather condition and activity. Birds may hide signs of illness; seek veterinary advice promptly. - Discuss safe nail and beak care, parasite or disease testing, bathing, sleep and handling. Do not medicate or use supplements without veterinary direction.

Signs of illness

Know when to seek urgent help

Birds can hide illness, so small changes may matter. Watch for reduced eating, sitting fluffed up for prolonged periods, unusual breathing, repeated vomiting, tail bobbing, weakness, reduced balance, bleeding, persistent changes in droppings or sudden inactivity.

Contact an avian veterinarian promptly if concerning changes appear. Breathing difficulty, collapse, ongoing bleeding, or inability to perch can require urgent care. Keep an emergency clinic number and secure transport carrier available; avoid internet medication recipes or home treatments.

SPECIES VETERINARY FOCUS

Request an avian exam and individualized plan for nutrition, weight, feather/skin condition, reproductive behavior and testing. Ask how to monitor dust-related respiratory concerns.

Household hazards

Prevent avoidable accidents

A flight-safe room has closed windows and doors, covered or secured mirrors and glass, no ceiling fans in use, and no access to hot cooking surfaces or water containers. Keep cats and dogs completely separated from the loose bird, even when they appear calm.

Avoid tobacco smoke, candles, aerosol sprays, strong perfumes, paint fumes, overheated nonstick coatings and toxic houseplants. Store electrical cords, medications and small objects securely. Recheck hazards every time the furniture or household routine changes.

HOUSEHOLD SAFETY NOTES

Provide a predictable sleep and bathing routine and room to move. Feather dust and household fumes matter; keep cats and dogs separated during flight time.

Behavior and compatibility

Respect the individual bird

Plan social contact around the individual bird's preferences. Some species are naturally more independent, some form strong bonds, and many become frustrated when people ignore warning signals. Noise level, chewing and mess are normal parts of bird ownership rather than defects to punish.

Adding a second bird is not an automatic solution to loneliness. Discuss species, compatibility, quarantine and gradual introduction with an avian veterinarian or qualified behavior professional. Introduce birds at their own pace and provide separate safe enclosures initially.

BEHAVIOR AND LONG-TERM FIT

Crest movement can be a clue to state of arousal, not a complete reading of the bird's feelings. Check local restrictions and document lawful source and ownership for regulated birds. Rehoming, rescue and adoption may be alternatives to buying from a breeder.

Budget and long-term planning

Prepare for ongoing needs

The purchase or adoption fee may be only a small portion of lifetime cost. Include a suitable enclosure, safe transport carrier, replacement perches, enrichment toys, quality food, routine veterinarian visits, laboratory work when indicated, and a reserve for emergencies.

Plan for vacations, moves and the possibility that another caregiver will eventually need to take over. Large and long-lived parrots can represent decades of commitment; even smaller birds deserve long-term contingency planning. Keep records and emergency contacts together.

NOTES FROM THE SPECIES PROFILE

During free flight, shut the door and keep cats and dogs completely out of the room; never allow direct contact. Vaccines: ask an avian veterinarian There is no single routine vaccine schedule for all pet birds. A few vaccines are available for particular diseases and circumstances. A polyomavirus vaccine exists; whether it is appropriate depends on the individual bird and its exposure to other birds. A veterinarian should make that decision. Do not assume every bird needs vaccination or that no bird does.

First 30 days and checklists

Use this guide in everyday life

Week 1: prepare the enclosure, establish a quiet routine, verify that the bird is eating and drinking, and arrange a vet appointment. Avoid forcing handling while it adjusts. Weeks 2-3: observe preferences, introduce simple foraging or target training, and review the diet and setup with your veterinarian.

Week 4: review your daily record. Are eating, activity, sleep, droppings and weight trends stable? Are perches and toys safe? Can your bird move, exercise and rest comfortably? Revise the routine with professional advice as needed and keep a written emergency plan.

Owner checklist: [ ] safe enclosure [ ] fresh water [ ] appropriate diet [ ] trusted avian vet [ ] emergency contact [ ] daily observation log [ ] travel care plan

Reading and professional resources: Association of Avian Veterinarians (aav.org); MSD Veterinary Manual bird-owner resources; CDC healthy pets/birds guidance; local veterinary advice. Review species and jurisdiction requirements before purchase.