

A Cockatiel's Life Cycle

Author ~ Judy Brumley

A year for a cockatiel is a cycle made up of these seasons: the rest period, prenuptial molt and re-growing of feathers, the breeding season, postnuptial molt.

A "brooding" hen is sensitive to the temperature of her eggs and she rotates and turns them methodically. The last egg turned is placed outside the rest of the clutch of eggs. Every egg is where it is suppose to be. The miraculous egg provides the chick embryo a calcium source from the egg shell for the skeletal development along with the egg yolk for nourishment.

A cockatiel baby hatches eighteen to twenty-one days after a cockatiel hen lays an egg. The cockatiel hen's mate takes turns sitting the eggs usually when three eggs are laid. The hen sits all night long, while the male stays outside guarding the nest entrance. The pair switch early morning so the hen can eat during the day, while the cock bird incubates the eggs. Some pairs stay together in the nest all night.

The chick has to work inside the egg to hatch out. It has a specialized temporary projection on it's beak tip, called an "egg tooth". The chick turns all the way around inside the shell, while using the egg tooth to chip through the shell. This is called "pipping". Finally the little chick pushes with it's feet to open the shell into two neatly cut pieces.

The cockatiel hatchling's eyes are closed for approximately 10 days. It is covered in fine down. In approximately two weeks, "pinfeathers" develop, replacing the down. Pinfeathers are keratin sheath-like structures, containing a blood supply to a growing feather. Since cockatiels are always in a flock, and are social by nature, another cockatiel will help preen the pinfeathers, helping to open the new feathers it can't reach on its head.

Cockatiel chicks growth and development is amazing. Chicks hatched two days apart will be perhaps like a 1 month old human child, and a 6 month human child. The parents work diligently to find plenty of nourishing food to feed their growing nestlings.

Four week old cockatiel chicks still in the nest weigh more than an adult cockatiel. Chicks start going to the nest opening and peeking out at the world. At four to five weeks old nature gives the chick the natural instinct to want to slim down to "fledge", a cockatiel's most basic life skill, flight. The chick won't beg it's parents to be fed as many times in the day. The chick "fledges" and once that first giant step is taken, the very next thing the parent starts to teach the chick is where the food is. The parent will fly to the chick and to where the food supply is, backwards and forwards until the chick follows and starts the long process of learning to eat by itself.

Chicks are still entirely dependent upon their parents for food. They will learn from their parents to pick up food, sample it and attempt to return to the nest at night to sleep until they are fully weaned. Chicks wean from seven to ten weeks, eight being average, when parent-reared. The breeding cycle requires about 2 1/2 months from the time eggs are laid, until the chicks are weaned. The young cockatiel, becomes efficient at food foraging, gains weight back and continues to mature. Cockatiels begin a juvenile molt at 4-6 months, a young adult molt in 1 year of age, and complete adult molt at 2 years old. Cockatiel males will breed at 9 months old, but usually need more time and practice at being a good mate and father. A cock is mature at one year old and hens are considered mature at age one and a half years of age. The normal gray

cockatiel cock starts getting some yellow on his face in 4 to 6 months, and it is completely bright yellow approaching one year of age. He has the trademark orange cheek patch. The hen retains the gray head with duller cheek-patches. Both sexes have a 3/4 inch wide, white stripe on the wings above the flight feathers.

For a cockatiel, there is safety within a flock. If a cockatiel in the flock sees or hears something unknown, the whole flock would freeze. One may take flight, but be caught in the air by a hawk. A wild cockatiel's chest is very muscular and they are built for swift flight. Cockatiels being strong flyers, can quickly raise off the ground from where they were feeding on seeding grasses, insects and grain and quickly cover a great distance from real or perceived danger on the ground. In the wild, cockatiels spend their days foraging for food and participating in a variety of flock activities. They fly, climb, and socialize with other members of their flock while foraging and grazing.

In cockatiel's native land Australia, spring months are from August through November/December, depending on the prevailing weather conditions. They will be fit and have the best (nuptial plumage) feather condition for courtship.

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Judy Brumley