Overview of Primary Color Mutations

The Common Varieties

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The Normal Grey cockatiel is the nominant, or wild color form of the cockatiel, which is found in the interior scrubland dessert regions of its native Australia. Although a large number of Normal Greys are kept in aviaries and in homes as breeders and pets, there are an ever-growing number of color mutations available for those who appreciate them.

The popular, primary color mutations that are more readily available in cockatiels include: Pied, Lutino, Cinnamon, Pearl, and sometimes Whiteface. The rarer primary color mutations include: Recessive Silver, Fallow, Dominant Silver, Yellow-cheek, Pastelface, Gold-cheek, and Suffused Silvers. Any number of color mutations may combine to form impressive and lovely cross-combinations, some of which can create entirely new color forms. This article will first cover the primary color mutations more popular and readily available today.

The Pied mutation was the first mutation to appear in cockatiels. Pied cockatiels are a combination of gray, with a white, and/or yellow pied wash. Some Pieds have the white and yellow wash combine together to produce a rich, cream color. The pied wash can vary from very light to extra-heavy, to nearly completely clear marked birds that appear virtually devoid of any grey feathering.

Light Pieds are predominantly grey, with approximately 10 percent, to 25 percent, yellow, white, or cream, pied wash. An average to medium marked Pied may carry from 25 percent, to 70 percent pied wash; while heavy Pieds can carry between 70 percent, to 97 percent pied wash.

At first glance, Clear Pieds may appear to be ordinary Lutinos; however, when closely inspected over the back, rump, or under the vent, at least one or more gray feathers will be found indicating their identity as a true Pied. In order to be considered a Clear Pied, the pied wash must be at least 98 percent, or approaching 100 percent with at least one grey feather.

The ideal Pied will have perfect symmetry of markings, with one side of the body marked as the mirror image to the other side, while maintaining as large a body size as other color mutations. All Pieds have black eyes; they carry the traditional orange cheek patch and vary in the amount of darker melanin pigment on their feet and beak, depending upon the percentage of pied wash that is present.

Lutino cockatiels can appear mainly white, or light to deep yellow, or as a white bird with yellow on the head and additional areas such as the back, chest, wing-flights or tail-feathers. Newborn and juvenile Lutino cockatiels have red eyes, which may not be detected unless viewed under a strong light or in direct sunlight. However, as they mature, many Lutinos acquire additional melanin pigment in their eyes, which may darken into a deeper plum color over time. The facial covert feathers (cheek patch) is orange, the beak is a light horn color and the feet and legs are pink.

Avoid selecting a Lutino that carries a bald spot at the back of the head behind the crest. Baldness is an inherited fault and may be well-hidden until a Lutino raises its erectile crest to reveal the bald area. Aviculturists who wish to breed baldness out of their stock follow linebreeding programs, which select birds that lack the bald spot for their breeding programs. It can take a minimum of three generations to eradicate the trait for baldness from a Lutino line.

Well-colored Cinnamon cockatiels have an overall brown appearance rather than exhibit the less desirable grayish-brown tones. Some hens may carry more yellow pigment about the face than their Normal Grey counterparts. Cinnamon males, however, go on to develop the full yellow facial mask upon maturity. Cinnamons have dark eyes, light feet and slightly pigmented beaks. To obtain a well-colored Cinnamon, a cockatiel breeder who specializes in Cinnamons should be sought out.

The Pearl mutation carries showy yellow lacings, white lacings, or yellow and white lacings, from the back of the head, down the nape, through the shoulders and back. In the Pearl mutation, the center of the affected feathers is either yellow or white, outlined by grey. The lateral tail feathers are yellow with dark central veins; the flight feathers remain dark grey and the face and top of the crown is lightly colored yellow, which blends into the grey crest. Even females show a small amount of yellow in the facial mask. The orange cheek patch is present, and the beak, feet and legs are pigmented.

The Pearl mutation can range from lightly marked individuals, to heavily marked Pearls, depending upon the amount of lacings present. Well-marked Pearls have clearly defined markings extensively laced and more heavily concentrated on the shoulders. Upon adulthood, Pearl males acquire melanin pigment that cover up their pearl lacings. Having lost most their pearl markings, adult Pearl males may appear nearly indistinguishable from adult Normal Grey males. Those who retain some pearlings are rewarded on the show bench.

Because of its scope, the less available primary mutations are covered in separate articles. Look for them in upcoming issues of the digital e-publication, *Cockatiel Mutations Magazine*.

LINDA S. RUBIN qualified as a certified panel judge for cockatiels and parrots, judging shows since 1984 throughout the US, and in Puerto Rico and Canada. She has 35 years experience as an avian educator, national speaker and author of several books on her website, www.CockatielsPlusParrots.com. Linda currently serves as Specialty Organization Vice President of the American Federation of Aviculture, Inc., Founding President of the Cockatiel Foundation, Inc., and writes as a Bird Breeder Expert and columnist for BowTie's Animal Network, BirdChannel.com. Visit her site at www.CockatielsPlusParrots.com. and view mutation photos at Cockatiel Mutations Genome!

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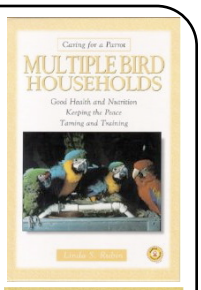

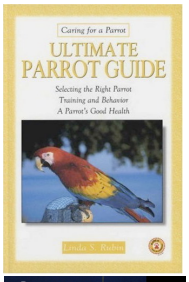

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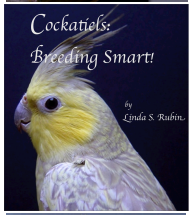

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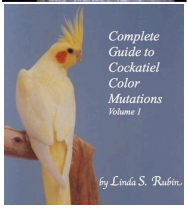

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