

MOLUCCAN COCKATOO CARE GUIDE

Cacatua moluccensis · Know before you bring one home

ORIGIN South Maluku, Indonesia	SIZE 46–52 cm	WEIGHT 650–950 g	LIFESPAN 50–70+ years	NOISE Extremely loud	TALKING Limited
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Personality & behaviour

- Intensely social, emotionally complex and physically powerful. A Moluccan forms an attachment closer to a dependent child than a pet, and it does not lessen with time. Affectionate beyond anything most owners expect, and devastated by being left alone.
- Very high risk of feather-destructive behaviour and self-mutilation, including chest wounds that need veterinary repair. Limit petting strictly to the head and neck — body stroking creates a sexually frustrated bird and is a leading cause of screaming and plucking. Separation distress is severe and genuine.
- Use positive reinforcement only — never hit, shout at or frighten a bird for biting or vocalising.

What to feed

- A low to moderate fat complete cockatoo pellet as the foundation.
- A large daily volume of vegetables and leafy greens.
- Sprouted seed, cooked legumes and whole grains in measured portions.
- Limited fruit, and very limited nuts — Moluccans gain weight readily.
- A cuttlebone and clean fresh water daily.
- Deliver most of the daily ration through foraging rather than a bowl. For a Moluccan this is behavioural medicine as much as feeding — time spent working for food is time not spent screaming or plucking.

Housing & cage setup

- A purpose-built enclosure of at least 180 × 150 × 200 cm, or better, a walk-in aviary. Bar spacing 25–38 mm in heavy-gauge stainless steel, with locking clasps on every door.
- Very heavy natural-branch perches (40–60 mm) replaced constantly, daily destructible wood in quantity, and large foraging toys. Budget for a continual, significant toy bill.

Time, company & noise

- Six or more hours of company daily, and even then many Moluccans struggle. A bird alone in a house all day will scream and pluck; this is the predictable outcome, not bad luck.
- One of the loudest birds on earth — screams have been measured at levels comparable to a jet engine at close range, and carry for kilometres. Physically painful indoors. Unsuitable for any attached or suburban housing.
- Continuous foraging, destruction and training. A Moluccan needs a genuine daily programme, not a few toys.
- Provide 10–12 hours of quiet, uninterrupted darkness on a predictable schedule. Sleep-deprived parrots become irritable, scream more and are more likely to pluck. A full 12-hour night, every night, is one of the few reliable tools against hormonal screaming.

Do not feed

- Sunflower-based seed mixes as a staple.
- Avocado — every part of the plant, including guacamole.
- Chocolate and cocoa.
- Caffeine, alcohol and xylitol (sugar-free sweetener).
- Onion, garlic, chives and leeks.
- Fruit pits and stones: apple, pear, cherry, apricot, peach and plum.
- Raw or dried beans — all legumes must be thoroughly cooked.
- Rhubarb leaves.
- Salty, sugary, fried or processed human food.
- Dairy in more than a trace — birds cannot digest lactose.
- Mouldy or fermenting food, including fruit left in the bowl.
- Anything from your mouth, plate or fork — human saliva carries bacteria that kill birds.
- Grit. Parrots husk their own seed and grit can cause fatal impaction.
- Human medicines or supplements unless prescribed by an avian vet.

Health & what to watch

- High risk of feather-destructive behaviour and self-injury, obesity, PBFD, respiratory irritation from heavy powder down, and chronic stress-related disease.
- **Before you buy:** Ask the seller for the hatch date, the closed ring number, a DNA sex certificate and any disease screening already done. A seller who cannot answer those questions, or who will not let you watch the bird eat, is a seller to walk away from. Ask what the bird is currently eating, so you can keep it stable for the first fortnight.
- **Your first month:** Book a wellness examination in the first week, not just when something looks wrong. Quarantine a new bird for 30–45 days away from any birds you already keep, ideally in separate air space. Recommended screening: psittacine beak and feather disease (PBFD), psittacosis (Chlamydia psittaci), polyomavirus and avian bornavirus.
- **Ongoing & human health:** Annual check-ups, moving to twice yearly for larger species over ten. Wing clipping is not routine care — discuss it first, because flight builds fitness, balance and confidence. Psittacosis passes to people as a flu-like illness or pneumonia: if you develop unexplained respiratory symptoms, tell your doctor you keep birds.

Who this species suits

- **First-time owners:** Absolutely not, under any circumstances.
- **Experienced owners:** Only for owners with specific cockatoo experience, aviary-scale housing, a home routine that means the bird is rarely alone, and a written succession plan.
- **Families & children:** No. The noise, the bite force and the bird's own emotional needs are not compatible with a typical family home.

Before you decide

- Someone is home with this bird for most of the day, for the next fifty years.
- My housing and neighbours can absorb screams comparable to a jet engine.
- I have cockatoo-specific experience, not just parrot experience.
- I have a legally recorded succession plan — this bird will very likely outlive me.
- If several answers are “No”, this is not the right bird for you — and walking away is a good outcome.

Urgent — see an avian vet today

- Difficulty or open-mouth breathing
- Pronounced tail bobbing at rest
- Fluffed, quiet and sitting on the cage floor
- Collapse or severe weakness
- Bleeding that does not stop, including a broken blood feather
- Seizures or loss of balance
- Repeated vomiting or regurgitation
- Not eating, or noticeable weight loss
- Straining, a swollen abdomen, or a hen unable to pass an egg
- Sudden major change in droppings
- Any contact with a cat or dog, even a minor scratch
- Suspected poisoning, fumes or trauma
- Any open chest or wing wound from self-mutilation — this needs same-day veterinary attention

Recommended avian specialist

- **Bryanston Avian, Exotic & Small Animals Clinic**
- 99 Grosvenor Road, Bryanston, Johannesburg
- 011 706 1381 · WhatsApp 061 533 9950 · info@baesac.co.za
- Not every vet treats birds. Find your nearest avian-experienced practice before you need one.



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