

# ***HISTORY OF SILVER COCKATIELS***

**By MIKE ANDERSON**

The first Silver Cockatiels were originally produced in Europe in the late 1960's. These birds were autosomal recessive, or more commonly just referred to as recessive. Linda Rubin has described these Northern Hemisphere birds in her book, *The Complete Guide to Cockatiel Mutations*, as having a wide fluctuation of colour. Individual birds are said to range in appearance from a steel or silver-grey to a fawnish-brown tone. Some of these birds can also exhibit red eyes whilst others appear browner.

These original silvers reportedly had difficulty reproducing as well as having a high incidence of blindness, which was thought to be genetic. These European Silvers were imported into the USA in the 1970's. American Silver cockatiels are now regarded as healthy, viable birds though they are still listed in the "rares" category for the purpose of showing. It is believed that the English silvers were derived from the same European strain.

Cockatiels described as "silver-grey" appeared in New Zealand in the early 1950's but were never established as a fixed mutation and this strain appears to have been lost.

A further silver, this time of the dominant variety was produced in England by Terry Cole in 1979. This mutation can appear as either single or double factor. Nestlings of both sexes appear the same colour which is described by Dulcie and Freddie Cook in their book, *Keeping and Breeding Cockatiels*, as being a "pale grey - brownish brick colour, with a darker grey on the head and neck giving a skull cap appearance".

At the first moult there are only subtle changes to the colour of the hen. However, the cock is transformed, taking on a silver-grey colour and losing all traces of the brownish-brick colour. Double factor birds can be much lighter giving an "almost yellowish-white appearance to the head and wings, with a wash of grey".

In the late 1980's a bird of similar appearance and characteristics to the Dominant Silver was produced by a well known Western Australian breeder, Hank Jonker.

The similarities were so close; the bird was originally also referred to as a Dominant Silver. When it later became apparent that this mutation was not dominant, but autosomal recessive, it was renamed Silver Spangle.

Western Australia also gave rise in the early 1980's to another dilute mutation identified as an Australian Silver Cockatiel. This strain of Silver, which was developed by well known Australian cockatiel breeder and author, Peggy Cross, has been combined with other mutations to produce some very attractive multi mutation specimens. However, my experience of breeding with this strain, and of other such birds I've seen, is that there is a lot of variation in the depth and tone of colouring in individual birds. The variations in colour I have observed range from an attractive bird of silver appearance, with brownish overtones, to other birds barely distinguishable from a normal grey. The hens in this Silver variety also generally appear darker than the cocks. The Australian Silver Cockatiel has also been referred to as a West Coast Silver.

Next to appear on the market in Australia is the bird we now refer to as the Pastel or East Coast Silver. I first became aware of this new mutation about 1990, shortly after I acquired my first Australian Silver Cockatiels. At the time these beautiful birds were in very short supply, were very difficult to breed because of their narrow gene pool and a reluctance of some early breeders to outcross, and were next to impossible to procure. It took two long years from first seeing a picture of the Pastel Silvers before I was able to buy any. Despite many inquiries I have not been able to ascertain when and by whom these birds were first bred. This is a shame as they are a significant part of the history of cockatiel mutations, not only in Australia but also throughout the world.

Pastel Silvers appear as a light, silver-grey colour. They lack the brownish overtones of some other silvers and are very uniform and consistent in the colours they produce. Typically, all youngsters fledge a light silver-grey colour, both cocks and hens looking the same. Pastel Silvers are a lighter shade on the chest than the back and wings and have very solid, even silver tones. Hens do not change colour with maturity, but cocks do go a darker shade of silver at their first moult. These birds have black eyes, dark beaks and feet and are autosomal recessive. A characteristic trademark of Pastel Silvers is the fine, tight feathering displayed by many of these birds. Pastel Silver Cockatiels are now established as fertile, viable breeding birds. The double mutation, Pastel Silver - Whiteface, is a most striking bird and being devoid of any yellow pigment, the silver is further accentuated.

*This article is an extract from part of a talk given on Pastel Silver Cockatiels on 08/02/99 to the members of The Native Cockatiel Society of Australia by Mike Anderson.*

*The lecture was followed by a slide presentation on Mike's aviaries and his Pastel Silver Cockatiels.*