

# Species Fact Sheets

**Order:** Psittaciformes  
**Scientific Name:** *Proboscigar aterrimus*

**Family:** Cacatuidae  
**Common Name:** Palm Cockatoo

**AZA Management:**  Green       Yellow       Red       None

**Photo (Male):**



**Photo (Female):**



**NATURAL HISTORY:**

**Geographic Range:** Europe       Asia       North America       Neotropical   
 Africa       Australia       Other Cape York Peninsula, Australia and Papua New Guinea

**Habitat:** Forest       Desert       Grassland       Coastal   
 Riverine       Montane       Other Woodlands, rainforest, dense savanah

**Circadian Cycle:** Diurnal       Crepuscular       Nocturnal       Other [Click here to enter text.](#)

**Cold Tolerance:** To 70° F       To 60° F       To 50° F       To 40° F   
 To 30° F       To 20° F       Other

Palm Cockatoos appear to do best in outdoor exhibits, but are susceptible to the effects of cold weather below -4 °C (25 °F). An indoor heated area must be provided in locations where the ambient temperatures go below freezing for more than a day or two. Wind breaks and heat lamps may provide adequate protection for birds located in areas which experience freezing weather for less than 24 hour period.

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**Heat Tolerance:**      To 30° F          To 50° F          To 70° F          To 90° F      
                                  To 110° F          Other

At least one area of the exhibit should be covered to provide the birds the opportunity to find shelter and shade. In very hot climates, it is important that these dark plumaged birds are able to get completely out of the sun. Misterters or showers can also be provided during hot, dry weather.

**Diet:**                      Frugivore    x      Carnivore          Piscivore          Insectivore      
                                  Nectivore          Omnivore          Folivore          Other (Add Below)   

### Captive Dietary Needs:

There is not a consistent diet that is recommended for this species as there has been little research in to their nutritional requirements. Since they are typically lean birds, obesity is not a problem. They are often fed diets that are mostly seed and nuts, but this has proved to be problematic when laying eggs or attempting to rear young as it does not provide enough nutrition for chicks to survive. A good general diet for Palm Cockatoos should consist of the following (based on weight):

60% manufactured pellet with proper calcium levels

14% mixed seed

9% fruit/vegetable mix

8% mixed nuts (in shell)

9% pine nuts (in shell)

If possible, it is best for the seeds to be completely excluded from the diet. Other items that can be added can include, but are not limited to:

Chopped or whole leaf greens, broccoli, peas, corn, mixed berries, fresh sprouted greens (kale, mustard, chickory, dandelion, turnip, arugula), pomegranate, Pandanus nuts

**Life Expectancy in the Wild:**                      Males:    Unknown                      Females:    Unknown

**Life Expectancy in Captivity:**                      Males:    N/A                      Females:    N/A

### BREEDING INFORMATION:

**Age at Sexual Maturity:**                      Males:    6-8 years                      Females:    6-8 years

### Courtship Displays:

Males courtship includes wing-spreading, foot stamping and drumming (done with either the balled up foot or a short stick being pounded on the top of a hollow stump) without making any calls other than soft clicks. Males blush their cheeks during this period, and chew the rim of the entrance and overtly “act out” dropping the splinters into the hollow. Male Palm Cockatoos also bob their heads into the hollow as if they are feeding, despite the fact that nothing is in their beaks. Other displays include head-turning, cheek blushing, crest raising and lowering, foot stamping, swinging, and numerous calls such as “disyllabic whistles, harsh ‘crac’ calls, and ‘hello’ calls”

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### Nest Site Description:

A rectangular box situated on end is the generally accepted type of nest used for Palm Cockatoos. Both open top boxes and boxes with large entrance holes, such as 30 cm (12") diameter, are used. These types allow the birds to drop nesting material into the box, which is an important breeding behavior. It is recommended that the nest box be between 1 m to 1.3 m (3' to 4') deep. Open top boxes, with a minimum 60 cm (2') of clearance to the top of the cage, have been the most successful.

Palm Cockatoos create their own nesting material from soft branches such as eucalyptus, bamboo, acacia, and willow. The cockatoos will splinter the branches and take the pieces into the nest, as mentioned above. Branches can be given to the birds year round, but should at least be provided at the onset of the breeding season and at regular intervals until an egg has been laid.

**Clutch Size, Egg Description:** 1 white egg

**Incubation Period:** 28-31 days

**Fledgling Period:** 90-100 days

### Parental Care:

Currently it is recommended that all eggs be pulled for artificial incubation and hand-rearing due to the lack of success with parent raised birds. Those birds that have been allowed to rear their own young in recent years have not had great success most likely due to a nutritional deficiency.

### Chick Development:

Chicks are slow growing. Hand-rearing protocols and detailed descriptions of development are well documented by numerous sources in the zoological field and by private breeders. Chicks that are hand-reared can take up to a year to become independent and will continue to beg from caretakers for several weeks afterwards.

## CAPTIVE HABITAT INFORMATION:

### Social Structure in the Wild:

Unlike other cockatoos, Palm Cockatoos are not flock feeders. They are generally observed singly, in pairs, or in small groups of up to five or seven individuals. It is unknown if these small groups are made up of related or unrelated individuals. Palm Cockatoos roost separately, but begin calling to each other after sunrise. Small groups congregate on trees in neutral areas during the day, where they preen, perform displays, and engage in various other social interactions. Pairs separate from these parties at sunset and return to their own territories. After making a round of sites within their territory, they return to roost, separately, in the same tree. Pairs maintain territories that include several potential nest trees. They regularly visit these sites throughout the year with increasing frequency during the breeding season.

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**Social Structure in Captivity:** It is recommended that Palm Cockatoos be kept in pairs for breeding. For non-breeding, they can be kept in groups from 2 to 20 birds to prevent aggression. As with other captive animals, close observation, attention to detail, and common sense should be used to determine compatibility. A socialization center has been established at Sedgwick County Zoo that can hold around 10 birds and allow for them select their own mate. Once a pair has been established, they will typically be sent to another zoological institution for breeding purposes. In captivity, there have been numerous aggressive incidents with several being fatal. Most of these occurrences have been between recently introduced pairs; however, a few have occurred with established pairs, some of which had previously produced a chick. Great care should be used when introducing birds.

**Minimum Group Size:** 1

**Maximum Group Size:** 20

**Compatible in Mixed Species Exhibits:** Yes

**Comments:**

Palm Cockatoos can be kept with other species of cockatoos as well as some species of Lorries and ground dwelling birds given an enclosure with ample space. To date, no one has recorded keeping other species of birds with breeding pairs of Palm Cockatoos.

**Optimal Habitat Size:** For the physical and mental well being of these birds the cage size should allow adequate flight and recreation. The recommended the minimum size aviary, which would accommodate their normal activities, is 2 meters wide by 3.3 meters long by 1.6 meters high (6' x 10' x 5'). This is a subjective view, not based on any study. The optimum would be any aviary larger than 2.6 m x 4 m x 2.6 m (8' x 12' x 8'). Twelve gauge wire is recommended to contain these birds due to a report that a Palm Cockatoo chewed through 14 gauge wire. Another safety aspect would be to double wire the pen to ensure flighted birds do not escape by chewing out of the exhibit.

**Management Challenges:** These birds are difficult to breed. While some successful breeding pairs repeatedly produce young, others will lay a fertile egg and then never reproduce again. Greater research into the nutritional requirements and breeding behaviors of these birds must be undertaken.

### ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

In 1983, 100 Palm Cockatoos (*Probosciger aterrimus*) were confiscated by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). Ten zoological institutions received ten birds each to hold until the legalities of the confiscation case were completed. After the case was resolved, each holding institution was allowed to keep two pairs. The remaining birds were auctioned off to private individuals by the USFWS. Most of the captive population in the US exists due to this confiscation.

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