**CARE GUIDE**

**CRESTED GECKO**

Ontario Reptile Rescue

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| Common Name | Crested Gecko |
| Scientific Name | *Correlophus cilliatus*, sometimes shown as *Rhacodactylus ciliatus* which is the previous scientific name. |
| Average Size | Length: 20 – 25cm (8 – 10”), including tail  Weight: 35 – 45g |
| Average Lifespan | 15 – 20 years |
| Oldest in Captivity (if known) | EcoVivarium Reptile Sanctuary in California has a crested gecko, Lady, who is estimated to be between 20 – 23 years old. |
| Natural Range | New Caledonia (Grande Terre and Isle of Pines) |
| Temperament | Docile, shy |
| Behaviour | Crested geckos are a crepuscular species, which means they are most active at dawn and dusk. They enjoy climbing and jumping, and can often be heard rustling around in their enclosures at night. Their tails are semi-prehensile, which means they can use them to hold things and help them climb. If frightened, the gecko may detach their tail as a defence mechanism. Unlike most other gecko species, the tail of a crested gecko does not grow back after it has been dropped. Most crested geckos will drop their tail before reaching adulthood. They will still be able to climb their tanks and live a normal life after losing their tail, but they may have a short adjustment period as they learn to balance without it.  Crested geckos are capable of vocalizations, sometimes making high pitch chirps\* or more of a “quack” sound. High pitch chirps can either indicate excitement or stress, whereas quacking sounds means “go away.” This sound is typically made by female geckos who are not interested in a potential mate.  \*These chirps sound very similar to a baby bird and are very quiet. They do not make this sound often. If your crested gecko is making a whistling noise regularly it may be a sign of a respiratory infection and should be taken to a reptile veterinarian. |
| Cohabitation | Although some female crested geckos have been kept together successfully in an enclosure double the size of the required minimum, there is still a risk for territorial behaviour between the two geckos that can lead to serious injury or malnutrition to one or both animals. Cohabitated female crested geckos must have enough resources and hiding spaces to minimize competition for resources. The keeper must be prepared to separate the geckos into separate enclosures if fighting occurs. There are more negatives than positives for cohabitation, and it should generally be reserved for advanced keepers who are willing to accept the risks and have proper set ups available for all geckos if the cohabitation does not work.  Male crested geckos are extremely territorial and should not be kept together under any circumstance as they will fight each other, leading to severe injuries and/or death.  Hatchling and/or juvenile crested geckos should not be housed with adults. Hatchlings are very small and delicate, and a large adult crested gecko may mistake them for food, or the hatchling could be severely injured during a territorial scuffle. |
| Activity Level | Most active during dusk and dawn (crepuscular). They are very active during the night, often jumping around in their enclosure. |
| Conservation Status | IUCN - Vulnerable |
| Enclosure Size | **12”Wx12”Lx18”H minimum** for hatchlings and juveniles.  **18”Wx18”Lx36”H minimum** for adults.  Crested geckos are arboreal, which means they enjoy climbing. Providing the gecko with lots of vertical space will enable them to exhibit their natural behaviours of climbing and jumping. More horizontal space can be benefical but is not as important as vertical space.  Some crested geckos have trouble finding their food in larger enclosures. Be sure to offer small amounts of food in multiple locations around the enclosure, or check their bowl to make sure they have been eating.  The enclosure should be thoroughly cluttered, meaning lots of places for the crested gecko to hide. This helps them feel secure in their environment and reduces stress. |
| Enclosure Materials | Glass: difficult to maintain temperatures and humidity. Has a reflective  surface that can stress animals out. Heavy, difficult to move, and easy to  break. Difficult to find in large sizes, or may be very expensive.  Wood: heavy, difficult to move. Easier to maintain temperatures and  humidity than glass. Needs to be sealed or it will rot.  PVC: light-weight, easy to move. Best material to maintain temperatures  and humidity. Does not rot, can seal seams to hold water. More expensive.  There are different grades of PVC that affect its ability to  bend/warp/deform, resist scratching, etc; you get what you pay for when it  comes to PVC. |
| Temperature Range | Crested geckos require a vertical temperature gradient, which means the bottom of the enclosure should be between **22C – 24C** (72 – 75F), while the top of the enclosure should range from **27 – 29C** (82 – 85F). Temperatures must **NOT** go above 29C (85F) or else the crested gecko is at severe risk of heat stroke. |
| Humidity Range | **60 – 80%**  The enclosure should be misted at least once a day (twice a day depending on the humidity of your house) to maintain humidity levels. A period of dropping down to 50% humidity before misting a second time will prevent the tank from becoming too humid and causing mould to grow.  If the crested gecko is shedding, humidity levels can be increased by misting more frequently to help the animal shed easier. Crested geckos become a pale, dull colour before they shed. A good shed should mostly come off in one piece. Crested geckos will use décor in their terrarium to help remove the skin, which they will eat to regain some of the nutrients lost while producing their fresh scales. Juveniles will typically shed biweekly as they grow, while adults will shed once a month. |
| Lighting | A light should be provided during the day to maintain the animal’s circadian rhythm. It does not to give off heat. A UVB light or full spectrum LED will suffice. A 12-hour day/night cycle is recommended. |
| Heating | Depending on the temperature of your house, overhead heating may not be required due to the heat sensitivity of this species. A deep heat projector/DHP is useful for crested geckos as it can provide heat during the day or night without disturbing them. A thermostat must be used with the heat source to ensure that the gecko does not overheat. The probe should be placed near the top of the enclosure. |
| UVB | Crested geckos belong to Ferguson Zone 1, which means they are exposed to a UV index of **0 – 0.7** in their natural habitat. In direct light, they may be exposed to a maximum UV index of 1.4 in their basking spot. A low level UVB light should be used to prevent overexposure. A great example is the Arcadia ShadeDweller Arboreal 2.4% bulb.  The notion that crepuscular and nocturnal species do not benefit from UVB is a myth. Species that fall into these categories have still been witnessed basking or cryptic basking during the day to help synthesize vitamin D. UVB has numerous benefits for the health of the reptile (ranging from the proper absorption of calcium to boosting their immune systems), and all species should be provided with appropriate UVB lighting to best mimic their natural environments. |
| Substrate | A substrate that holds humidity well is the best choice for a crested gecko. These substrates are usually a mix of organic top soil, peat moss, and coconut coir. You can either create a mix yourself, or purchase premixed soil. Placing leaf litter on top of the substrate is recommended as it assists with maintaining humidity levels.  A drainage layer is recommended to prevent the soil from becoming too muddy and to help with humidity as the water will pool in the drainage layer. Leca, or clay balls, should be placed at the bottom of the terrarium followed by a layer of drainage mesh (similar to what is used in gardens before you place top soil). The substrate is then placed on top of the mesh. This prevents the soil from mixing in with the leca. If planning to make a bioactive terrarium, a drainage layer is essential to ensure the plants thrive. |
| Handling | Crested geckos are generally tolerant of handling, but should be handled with care as they can drop their tails if stressed and are capable of jumping. Using a hand-to-hand method (sometimes called “treadmilling”) is best with crested geckos as they will either crawl from one of your hands to the next as you place it in front of them, or they will leap to your next hand. Short handling sessions of up to 20 minutes are best for this species.  Young crested geckos are known for being extremely flighty and are very fragile, it is best not to handle them as hatchlings. Juvenile crested geckos can be handled over a soft surface in case they jump away unexpectedly.   Never pick up a crested gecko by their tail, limbs or head. Instead place your head in front of them and gently move it towards them. They should put their front feet on your hand. From there you can scoop them up and support their fully body with your hand. Keep a second hand in front of them in case they jump while being removed from their enclosure. |
| Feeding | Juvenile crested geckos (0 – 12 months) should be offered a powdered diet daily, and insects up to twice weekly.  Adult crested geckos (over 12 months of age) should be offered a powdered diet three times a week and insects once per week.  Insects should be appropriately sized. A good rule to follow is to make sure that feeders are not wider than the space between the gecko’s eyes. Any worms fed should be soft bodied (e.g., small silkworms, small hornworms), as mealworms and superworms are more difficult for this species to digest. Not all crested geckos will eat live insects.  Many crested geckos will get their hydration from water droplets after their tank has been misted, but they should still be provided with a water bowl. It is a myth that they will not drink from bowls. |
| Diet | Powdered diets such as Pangea or Repashy, supplemented with live insects.  Rotating between different flavours of powdered diet ensures a variety of proteins and prevents a crested gecko from becoming too picky with flavours. Some crested geckos may not eat live insects, and instead should have a powdered diet that includes insects mixed into their rotation. |
| Multivitamin + supplements | Many powdered diets already include vitamins and calcium, but occasionally adding in a supplement can benefit your gecko. If fed live insects, they should be dusted with calcium and/or a multivitamin supplement.   Some crested geckos may have trouble shedding. If humidity levels are correct, mixing some Arcadia ShedSupport (a calcium powder mixed with Vitamin B) into their food occasionally or onto insect feeders may help. |

The information in this care guide is based on both practical experience as well as research papers published by reputable sources. Reptile husbandry is constantly evolving as we learn more about these remarkable creatures, never rely on one source for information and always strive to learn more.