Gorgeous Gecko: Crested Gecko Care Sheet

New Caledonian Crested Gecko: Correlophus ciliatus (formally Rhacodactylus ciliatus, reclassified in 2012)

The Crested Gecko is native to the island chain of New Caledonia, in the South Pacific northeast of New Zealand and east of Australia. It is perhaps the best pet reptile to be “discovered” in the past century. Previously thought to be extinct, numerous Crested Geckos were found happily living on a few of the minor islands off of New Caledonia as well as on the mainland in the 1980's. Since their rediscovery, their capture and import has been ended. Not only comical and beautiful, these little guys are extremely hardy and easy to care for!

They also acclimate well to regular gentle handling and some even appear to enjoy being taken out of their cages and held.

**Average Size:** 7 to 9 inches (half of this being its tail)

**Life Span:** Over 15 years if properly cared for.

**Diet:** Perhaps the best part of keeping Crested Geckos is that they do not need to be fed live insects. Although I highly recommend a varied diet. They are an omnivorous species, which in the wild eats both insects and rotting fruits and flowers.

In captivity they can be fed an excellent powdered diet mixed with water made by us, Gorgeous Gecko.

**Gorgeous Gecko Gourmet** (sold on this site) containing banana and assorted other fruits, plus other nutritional ingredients. There are other Complete diets on the market sold by Repashy Super Foods and Pangea Reptile which are also mixed with water into a milk shake consistency. We suggest you avoid food pellets and other private label food sold by the major pet store chains.
*It is NOT recommend feeding your crested gecko, human baby food. It is nutritional deficient, lacking key minerals and vitamins. Feeding your crested gecko baby food will lead to malnutrition, resulting in structural deformities and other health issues as your crested gecko matures.

**Feeding:** If feeding your crested gecko powdered diet mixes solely, most keepers feed either daily or every other day, leaving the dish in there for a second night. Geckos do not eat a lot, so for a single gecko it is suggested that you use a plastic cap of a small bottled water for food. Your gecko will eat at night, or late evening. Depending on when you observe your gecko, you may never see it actually eat.

If you are concerned whether or not your gecko is eating at all, look for their feces. Evidence that something is going in and coming out.

**Speaking of feces, or stools...** they should be the shape of an extra large grain of rice and mushy. Occasionally loose or runny stools may be observed if your animal is stress or territory marking.

Consistently loose runny stools indicate a dietary imbalance of too much sugar or it may indicate the presence of internal parasites (see common health issues below)

**Live Prey:** I prefer to occasionally offer feedings with gut loaded crickets lightly dusted with a mineral powder. Crickets should be no larger than the width of the geckos’ head or they can choke and die. Feeding crickets at least once a week or every other week keeps the geckos active and allows them to use their natural hunting instincts. Plus it’s fun to watch!!

**HOW MANY CRICKETS DO I FEED THEM?**

Only feed enough crickets, say 2-4 crickets that they will eat right away. Crickets left in the cage longer than the gecko can immediately eat, may in-turn feast on and/or bite your gecko while it sleeps.

**DO NOT FEED WILD INSECTS OR INSECTS FOUND AROUND THE HOUSE – THEY MAY CARRY DISEASES THAT COULD BE DEADLY TO YOUR PET OR BE COVERED IN PESTICIDES**
**Housing:** Crested Geckos can be housed in either screen or glass/plexi enclosures. In drier areas it is recommended that glass/plexi cages be used to provide adequate humidity. In areas with higher humidity (above 40% and above) screen cages are excellent for providing adequate ventilation. Cages should be permitted to dry out entirely during the day following a heavy night time misting. Housing should be chosen to permit this to occur, otherwise problems with molding of the housing from too high of humidity can occur, or the animals can have retained shed due to low humidity.

**Size:** Since the Crested Gecko is arboreal (lives in the trees) it strongly prefers a cage that is taller than it is long so it has room to climb.

Young crested geckos can be kept in small (1-2 gallon) cages or Kritter Keepers, until they are about 10 grams. Housing that is too large (i.e. 30 gallon tank for a hatchling) should be avoided when keeping very young crested geckos as they may have trouble finding their food. A single adult crested gecko can be housed in a 20 gallon long aquarium set up on its long end.

- I recommend a screen cage measuring 1 foot long X 1 foot deep X 18" to 2 feet high for 1 to 3 adult geckos.

*Multiple adolescent of adult males should not be housed together as they will fight to the death.*

**Female crested geckos** can be housed together, though some may have "personality" differences and quarrel. If this occurs they should be permanently separated- females that take a dislike to each other rarely get over it. Overall the female crested geckos seem to enjoy each others company, often being found curled up under leaves together.

If males and females are housed together mating and egg laying is almost guaranteed. Juveniles should be kept in like-sized groups as larger ones can and will bully smaller ones, preventing their access to food.
**Substrate:** Paper towels or cage liners are by far the easiest substrate to use, though not very aesthetically pleasing. If males and females are housed together with the intent of breeding they will make finding the eggs much simpler, however. Reptile barks can also provide a nice substrate, though they carry the same risk of ingestion, leading to choking or digestive blockages.

**NEVER use pine/cedar chips intended for small mammals as they can make your gecko very, very ill.**

**Habitat:** Crested Geckos love their vertical space. Bamboo poles and vertically placed cork flats will make your crested geckos very happy. They are also especially fond of plants, such as Pothos (which is extremely hardy), both live and fake. The more hiding places that you give your gecko the less stressed it will be, and consequently healthier. If you are going for a sterile, easy to clean set up egg crates make excellent, though not pretty, hiding places and maximize surface areas for your geckos.

For breeding purposes I use a very simplified set up but you can make an amazing vivaria to house your crested gecko. However I do not recommend mixing different species of geckos in the same enclosures. You risk your crested gecko being eaten, injured, or contaminated with parasites and diseases specific to other species.

**Grooming and Hygiene:** Crested geckos require very little actual grooming. Most important is to maintain adequate humidity (see Humidity below) to prevent retained sheds (old skin that does not completely come off during shedding). In the case of a retained shed the gecko can be carefully soaked in shallow warm (room temperature- 70-75 degrees F.) water, or placed in a small plastic container (with holes punched) with damp paper towels for 30 minutes twice daily until the shed is removed. Always wash your hands before and after touching your gecko or habitat contents to help prevent transmission of Salmonella and other infectious diseases.
**Temperature:** Crested Geckos prefer to be kept at room temperature (from 65- 80 degrees F). They experience dis-stress at temperatures over 83 or under 65 degrees. We keep the temps in the summer at 79 degrees F and no lower than 69 degrees F. in the winter.

Geckos, like all reptiles are cold-blooded. The colder the temperature, they less active they will be. At colder temperatures they metabolism slows and they eat less, grow slower, and move less. Some people keep a small heating pad attached to the enclosure so the gecko can seek out a warm spot in the winter. This may only be a concern if you live in a climate that get particularly cold in the winter and room temps are not easily controlled.

We are located in Texas where our biggest concern is keeping the temps below 80 degrees F during our extremely hot summers of 100 degree F plus!.

**Lighting:** As a nocturnal species, your Crested Gecko will likely not come out when bright lights are on. They do need some ambient light in the room at night or they will be disoriented in total darkness. I DO NOT recommend basking lights, moon glow, or red nocturnal lights. These lights even in low wattages get way too hot and tend to heat the enclosure to unnatural temperatures. This is important especially for the cooling seasons. You need to allow your geckos to experience natural fluxes in temp with the seasons. As long as you do not let your home dip below 65 or above 83 you are in the safe zone. The best nighttime lighting I have found for display purposes is mini red Christmas lights just bunched up and set on top of the cage. It is really pretty and will not heat up the cage.

**Water:** Provide a constant supply of clean, fresh, filtered, chlorine-free water in a shallow bowl that cannot be tipped over. Some geckos love to poop in their water. Remove water that has been contaminated immediately and replace with fresh water. Make sure the water bowl is shallow enough or the appropriate height so that your gecko may easily drink from it.

- **DO NOT USE TAP WATER.** The chlorine content of metropolitan tap water is excessive and is poison to your gecko.
DO NOT USE SPRING WATER: Spring water has been shown to contain naturally occurring levels of sulphur, methane, and arsenic, a poison. The quality of bottled spring water is not closely regulated. Do not believe claims to the contrary, or the use of words such as "natural", "fresh", or "sparkling". Bottlers of spring water get around the regulations by using "local" water sources. Since the water does not cross state lines it is not regulated by the FDA.

DO NOT USE DISTILLED WATER... distilled water has been converted to steam and then condensed, removing all minerals. The lack of minerals in the water can leach (steal) calcium from the bones of your crested gecko. Reverse Osmosis purified water pulls the minerals out during the purification process so it presents the same mineral leaching action that distilled water does. A liquid mineral supplement may be added to the water to bring it back into balance.

Also, using a clean spray bottle (new- do not repurpose a spray bottle previously used for cleaning supplies.), mist your Crested Gecko with water twice daily. They will eagerly lap the water off of the surfaces in their enclosure, their face and eyes and the misting will provide much needed humidity. Don’t over mist or you will get a mold problem.

Humidity: Ideal constant humidity should average 50% or more, with twice daily misting raising it up to 80%. Keep in mind that enclosures with higher levels of humidity will be conducive to growing mold and bacteria faster. Depending on where you live, your natural humidity levels will determine how vigilant you'll need to be in maintaining healthy humidity. Remember forced air heating systems can also rapidly reduce the humidity during the winter, along with air conditioning in the summer.

Habitat Maintenance: Change water in the bowl daily, remove feces daily. Thoroughly clean the tank at least once a week. Use a 10% bleach solution once a month to clean and disinfect the enclosure. Where available, use Chlorhexidine 2% antiseptic cleaner instead of a bleach solution. Chlorhexidine 2% is non-toxic, biodegradable and a favorite of veterinarians to kill germs, bacteria, and viruses. We recommend a paper towel

Normal Behavior and Handling: Crested Geckos are a nocturnal species that will spend all day sleeping. Once they get up in the evening, crested geckos are amusing to watch wandering around their cage. Crested geckos seem to enjoy each others company greatly and often sleep together during the day. At night it is not uncommon to hear growls, squeaks, barks and yips as they talk to each other in the
same cage, and to geckos in other cages. Cresteds are normally amenable to handling with a little bit of patience and work. Very young crested geckos (under three months) should be handled very little, if at all. Older juveniles and adult crested geckos can be handled for as much as they tolerate, which will vary from individual to individual; some never really settle down, while others are happy to sit on a shoulder or desk for hours at a time.

**** When you first receive your crested gecko, it is recommended that you DO NOT handle at all, or keep handling to a bare minimum for the first two weeks to avoid overstressing your animal. this cooling down period allows it to acclimate to its new environment easily and comfortably. Remember: Being handled is not natural for your reptile and always induces a certain amount of stress. Over time handling can be increased as they become accustomed to you. It is not recommended that you handle your gecko for more than 15 minutes at a time and then, only once a week.

Two warnings should be heeded.

First, Crested Geckos love to jump! Crested geckos that are not accustomed to handling should be kept close to the ground until they have lost their desire for flight.

Second, if your Crested Gecko drops its tail it will never grow back (unlike many other species). These stumpy Cresteds suffer no long term negative effects, but never regain their beautiful, prehensile tails. Rough handling and overly stressing your crested gecko should be avoided if you want your pet to retain its caudal appendage.

Signs of a Healthy Pet: Active and alert, Healthy skin, Clear eyes, Eats regularly, Clear nose and vent. When sleeping during the day they can appear almost dead. New owners that only observe their reptile during the day when they are the least active, sometimes become concerned that their gecko is not healthy.
HEALTH TIP: Locate an exotic animal veterinarian or a vet that specializes in reptiles in your area, BEFORE you need them! Call them up and inquire what their charges are, how much a 'health check' would be. Ask if they have treated crested geckos before. If they haven't but have treated other reptiles, ask if they would research their care so that you may use this veterinarian service in the future. for many vets, this is a simple thing for them to do. It is better to be prepared upfront, then hold off when your animal is in need, or you want to 'save money" and possibly diagnose over the internet.

Common Health Issues and Red Flags:

Dehydration: A reptile has a limited ability to maintain hydration and must have access to a consistent and clean source of water. Hydration and electrolyte levels effect every internal system within your pet.

Dehydration is the leading cause of death in reptiles in general. If your gecko escapes it's enclosure it could die in as little as three days without water.

Internal parasites are the most common issue in Crested Geckos next to dehydration, and for that matter all reptiles in general. Reptile vets will speak about "the parasite load," meaning that a certain level of parasites are considered normal. It is when this parasite load become abnormally large that the health of the animal suffers. Stress is a big contributor in compromising your gecko's immune system.

Internal Parasites can be easily diagnosed by your veterinarian via a fresh stool sample and is worth the small investment, if you suspect a problem, or if you have acquired a new gecko and pan to introduce it to your colony.

Possible Symptoms of parasites: Internal parasites may cause weight loss, the inability to put weight on, extreme lethargy, loose runny stools, or consistently poorly shaped stools. The chronic inability to properly shed their old skin.
NOTE: These symptoms do not specifically point to a health issue, but if you notice any of these signs (especially in combination), please contact your exotic animal veterinarian.

**Entameoba Invadens:** A protozoan parasite which needs to be diagnosed and treated by a veterinarian. If left untreated too long it can be fatal. Reptile amoebiasis can be easily treated with metronidazole, an amoebicide drug.

Parasites can be easily transmitted via the use of live feeders such as Dubia roaches and crickets, or the contact with live feeders feces, or their own gecko feces.

**Stress:** Normally, crested geckos are extremely hardy. Stress can literally sap the life out of your gecko and compromise its immune system to where ordinary or simple health issues can become acute or life threatening.

**How to minimize stress:**

- Make sure that you don't excessively handle your gecko.
- A skittish, or run away crested feels threatened. Seek to maintain a peaceful existence for your gecko.
- Be conscious of loud noises, loud music, and other situations that may create a disturbing environment.
- Take care the temperature extremes are avoided and temperature range is controlled and maintained.
- Make sure that hydration levels are maintained and consistent.
- Make sure that there is a natural balance between daylight/light and night-time/extremely low light.
- Shipping a crested geckos to you is a stressful event. Make sure you allow a couple weeks of peace and quiet for an acclimation period.

**Mites:** Although mostly uncommon in a private collection, mites are a possible complication. They will most likely be noticed first around the eyes or the corners of the mouth as little round, black/brown creepy creatures. They can be treated by many commercial products available at a local pet shop or by a veterinary strength solution available from your veterinarian. Be sure to follow the directions on the product. Treatment of mites usually takes close to a month of continuous care as eggs can hatch daily and must be taken care of ASAP. These little bugs have an extraordinary reproductive rate. If you have more than one infested reptile, take extra precautions not to transfer the mites from one to another.
Impaction of the digestive tract: If you are keeping your Crested Gecko on a natural substrate and feeding insects it will likely ingest some of the substrate at each feeding. In small quantities this will not be overly harmful, but in large quantities your gecko may become impacted with substrate in its intestine, a condition that is almost invariably fatal. Prompt treatment by an exotics vet may save your pet's life. We avoid this altogether by using paper towl as a substrate.

Calcium Deficiency - Without adequate calcium in your Crested's diet, aside from a slow growth rate, you will more than likely encounter Metabolic Bone Disease. The first symptom usually noticed is uncontrolled twitching of the geckos toes or legs, a floppy jaw, or a kinked tail. This can be a fatal disease if not treated promptly. If this problem occurs, I suggest raising the amount of calcium in the gecko's diet immediately. Take your gecko to a good exotics vet who can prescribe a calcium supplement. This is most common in breeding females.

We have formulated our Gorgeous Gecko Gourmet gecko food with the appropriate calcium/phosphorus ratio (approx: 2 to 1 ratio), plus the right proteins to maximize mineral uptake. Make sure any diet you use has this calcium/phosphorous ratio.

Recommended Books:
**** Crested Geckos by Adam Black ** (my personal favorite and most current publication)
***Crested Geckos by Philippe de Vosjoli
**Rhacodactylus by Philippe de Vosjoli, Frank Fast, Allen Repashy