

## **Crested Gecko General Care**

### *Correlophus cialatus*

Preface: Crested geckos, sometimes referred to as eyelash geckos, are a medium sized gecko native to New Caledonia. Originally described in 1866 crested geckos were thought to be extinct until 1994 when they were rediscovered. In 1995 the first exports of crested geckos for private collection began but quickly came to an end by 1998. Despite this short window of exportation crested geckos have since become one of the world's most popular pets. They are the 5<sup>th</sup> most searched reptile on the internet and the 2<sup>nd</sup> most popular pet gecko. With their docile nature, multitude of morphs and ease of care crested geckos are fantastic pets.

### **Things you need before buying/adopting a crested gecko:**

1. Cage: an 18x18x24 or 18x18x36 terrarium for adults
2. Lighting: LED light or low level UVB
3. Supplements: Repashy Calcium Plus
4. Thermometer and Hygrometer: Govee
5. Substrate: bare tank, paper towel, Eco Earth/Reptisoil or full bioactive
6. Décor: driftwood, cork tubes and rounds, lots of plants (fake or real)
7. Food: prepared gecko diets and insects
8. Spray bottle
9. Heat source: radiant heat if temperatures fall below 68°F

### **Tank and Enclosures**

In nature crested geckos spend much of their time traversing between the forest floor and the forest's lower canopy. It is important that a crested gecko is provided with an enclosure that is taller than it is wide. These geckos will utilize the entire enclosure but prefer to sleep, hide and spend time higher up.

As an adult, crested geckos should be kept in an 18x18x24 terrarium or similar sized enclosure. Many keepers and breeders have begun to consider this the bare minimum, recommending 18x18x36 or larger. A crested gecko will utilize as much space as you provide for them enjoying climbing and leaping across the enclosure.

Depending upon the age you receive your crested gecko you may need to keep the gecko in multiple enclosures until it reaches adulthood. Hatchlings and juveniles can be kept in small enclosures like a 6-quart plastic shoebox. Once they reach 7-10 grams it is recommended to step them up into a 27-quart bin or 12x12x18 terrarium and allow them to reach 30-35 grams before moving into their large adult enclosure.

### **Décor**

Crested geckos love clutter. Supplying ample climbing surfaces as well as plenty of cover will make your gecko feel safe and secure. Branches, driftwood, cork tubes and flats are all great objects for them to climb on. Having a mix of vertical, horizontal, and diagonal structures is best. Make sure these items are secure as crested geckos do jump from object to object. Providing foliage with either fake or real plants provides the geckos with places to hide and retreat to if needing security. Ensure you use as much space as possible within the enclosure avoiding empty, negative space.

### **Substrate**

Substrate for a crested gecko can be as simple or complex as you would like it. The most common substrates are paper towels, coco coir or bioactive. If using paper towels, they should be changed as often as they get spoiled. Coco coir products like Eco Earth or Reptichip can be helpful in raising humidity but must be spot cleaned. Bioactive setups should include a drainage layer, drainage layer barrier, a substrate such as ABG and topped with leaf litter. This is quickly becoming many keepers preferred way of housing crested geckos. Paired with a clean up crew (isopods and springtails) bioactive enclosures are easy to maintain, requiring less cleaning, hold humidity better and are beautiful when full of lush plants.

### **Temperature and Humidity**

Room temperature is ideal for most crested geckos, 68-75°F, with the sweet spot being 72-74°F. They can safely experience daytime temperatures of 82°F and nighttime lows of 65°F. Any temperatures colder or hotter may do harm to your crested gecko. If you are having trouble reaching desired temperatures radiant heat may be used, a ceramic heat emitter (CHE) connected to a thermostat can be used to create a 'basking' area. Have this 'basking' area near the top of the enclosure with the probe for the thermostat nearby. Keep the temperature setting on the thermostat no higher than 78°F and check accuracy often with an infrared thermometer.

Crested geckos appreciate a range of humidity, 50-80%. You can achieve this by misting their enclosure with a spray bottle or garden sprayer. Mist enough so that the enclosure attains 80% relative humidity and then allow it to 'dry out' reaching 50-60% humidity before misting again. Every enclosure and home is different so it may take some trial and error before figuring out your enclosures humidity. You may also need to mist more frequently during shedding if your gecko is having difficulty removing all of it's shed. Pro tip: use distilled or reverse osmosis water to avoid hard water stains.

### **Social Behavior and Cohabiting**

Crested geckos are not social creatures and do not spend time socializing with other geckos in the wild except to mate. They do not need friends. In captivity females cohabitated with males face many risks for over-mating. Males are incessant and will attempt to mate with the female endlessly. Without a break the constant mating and egg laying may prove fatal. Females cohabitated together do not typically show signs of aggression but it's not unheard of. They will compete for food, the best hiding spots, perches, etc., which creates undue stress leading to health problems. Males on the other hand are aggressive and will fight each other. In a small enclosure (all our enclosures are small vs nature) they do not have the opportunity to run away, this can lead to the death of your gecko. It is best to avoid cohabitating your crested geckos and supplying them with individual enclosures.

### **Lighting**

Being primarily crepuscular/nocturnal a day/night cycle is required for crested geckos. This can be as simple as an LED light on a timer. A UVB light is not required but may be offered as crested geckos have been known to pseudo-bask. If you choose to use UVB a low level UVB like Arcadia ShadeDweller is recommended.

### **Feeding and Supplements**

Feeding crested geckos is simple. There are a multitude of specific crested gecko diets (CGD) on the market, Pangea and Repashy being the best. Simply mix with dechlorinated water and offer in a small food dish or gecko ledge. Adults should be fed every 2-3 days and hatchlings should be fed daily. It is recommended that you remove the CGD after 24 hours. These diets are complete and do not need any other supplements added to them.

Insects may also be provided. A varied diet of gut loaded insects dusted in a quality vitamin supplement, Repashy Calcium Plus, may be offered 1-2 times per week.

Failure to feed a high quality CGD or dust insects may lead to health issues like metabolic bone disease (MBD) being the most prevalent.

To ensure the highest quality of CGD and supplements, store all of these in the refrigerator. Replace supplements every 6 months and replace CGD every 6 months to a year depending on brand.

A shallow water dish may also be provided, changed daily. Though preferring to drink from water droplets on surfaces crested geckos will utilize a water dish if thirsty.

### **Handling**

When you first receive your crested gecko you should leave it alone and not attempt to handle it for the first 1-2 weeks. Crested geckos can be easily trained to take handling well and do quite well being handled for short amounts of time. Many geckos are skittish at first but with time and effort your gecko can come to enjoy handling and hanging out with you outside of their enclosure. You can start out by slowly offering a hand near the face, allowing them to smell you and see you are not a threat. Do this daily for some time. Watch for tail movement, rapid shaking can be indicative of stress/fear and may result in a tail drop. As they become accustomed to your hand you may begin light petting of their back and even hand feeding CGD (be careful hand feeding, doing it as a treat, as crested geckos can become reliant on this and refuse to eat from a bowl). Eventually as they become more comfortable with you you can begin picking them up. Always try to pick up from the side or front, never from above as this can trigger their prey flight response. Once you can pick up your gecko be prepared for them to launch themselves. Crested geckos tend to jump so be prepared to catch them. Always use an open hand to catch a jumping gecko, giving them a safe place to land. Eventually you will see the signs that your gecko is about to jump and typically if you offer another hand in front of them they will leap to it.

### **Lifespan**

Crested geckos have an expected lifespan of 15+ years when kept under the correct husbandry conditions.