

# Caring for your Crested Gecko

**Scientific name:** *Rhacodactylus ciliatus*

**Common name(s):** New Caledonian Crested Gecko; Crested Gecko or Eyelash Gecko



*Rhacodactylus ciliatus*

**Introduction:** Crested geckos have become increasingly popular as pets over the last few years for a number of good reasons; they are absolutely cute, have individual personalities, are easy to handle and do not require extensive care requirements or enclosures. Thought to be extinct until its rediscovery in 1994, on the Isle of Pines, a tiny island just off the coast of New Caledonia. The rediscovery sparked much excitement amongst gecko hobbyists, but no one could predict how these geckos would have taken off in captivity. Due to their docile nature and easy care requirements, the crested gecko is now one of the most commonly kept geckos in the world.

**Habitat/Distribution:** *R. ciliatus* belongs to the *Rhacodactylus* family; these arboreal geckos are found in small numbers in New Caledonia and a few surrounding islands, but nowhere else on Earth. In the wild, these geckos inhabit dense, tropical forests, and spend their days sleeping in the leaves of the trees in which they live. At night however, crested geckos come to life and explore their surroundings by leaping from tree to tree, foraging for food and looking for mates.

**Size:** 7-8 inches total length including tail with just over half of that length, 3.5-4.5 inches being their body.

**Housing:** In general, crested geckos are easy to keep, and housing them is no exception. Crested Geckos can be maintained in simple conditions or in elaborate naturalistic vivariums. Adult crested geckos should be housed in a 20 gallon tall aquarium or larger. These geckos are reasonably active (especially in the evening) and should be given room to move about. Adults and babies do very well in naturalistic vivariums and these can become quite attractive but they sometimes present somewhat of a challenge for keepers.



The drawback with naturalistic setups when housing either adults or babies or breeding sized adults is it will prove difficult to find eggs or babies but if you are observant and diligent in cage care this issue is easily overcome. For the substrate in a terrarium setting, I recommend a peat moss/Eco-Earth or Coconut Fiber type substrates or something similar. These materials tend to hold moisture better than

others and are easy to work with. Patches of sphagnum moss can also be used and not only adds interest and beauty to the enclosure, but will further aid in humidity management.

Crested geckos are masters of their arboreal domain, and will very much appreciate a variety of climbing structures within their tank. Driftwood, slabs of cork bark, or grapevine may all be used. When choosing plants, I have used Pothos vines and Bromeliads the in cages and these seem to do well, though other plants can be used just be sure whatever you use is certified pesticide free or use synthetic ones. Opt for plants with broad, flat leaves, as these surfaces seem to be a favorite resting spot for this species. Vines also work well and are great for your geckos to climb on, they and add to the natural look of the enclosure.



**Hatchlings and small juveniles:** For small Geckos up to about 10 grams in size, I use Small "Kritter Keeper" containers (aka Herp Havens or Faunariums). I've found these to provide excellent visibility, which is a major concern when rearing hatchling crested. As the geckos grow it is a good idea to reduce the number of geckos per container to reduce possible tail loss and other hazards caused by over-crowding.



**Temperature/Lighting:** Cresteds thrive at room temperature. I keep mine between 75-80 during the day with a drop into the high 60's or low 70's at night. At temperatures of 85 degrees or warmer, crested geckos will become stressed, which could lead to illness or death. Lighting is not required to house Crested Geckos. However, in a vivarium setting some owners choose to use UVB or fluorescent lighting to mimic day and night settings and to promote the growth of live plants. If you do choose to use either sort of lighting, it should be for no less than 12 hours which is the standard daytime photo period for crested geckos. In any case, the lights should be turned off at night as these are nocturnal animals that don't require a light to see.

**Humidity/Water:** Cresteds enjoy high humidity, preferably between 60-80%, though you want to make sure the cage dries out between mistings to reduce the possibility of bacteria/fungus growth. For water I mist my crested 1-2 times a day and they do fine just by drinking the water off the side of the enclosures it also keeps the humidity at a higher level throughout the day/night. It is important however like any other animal that they always have some supply of water available so a shallow water bowl may be added to insure they have a constant water supply.

**Feeding:** Crested Geckos are one of the easiest geckos to feed. In nature they eat bugs, fruit and plant nectar. In captivity many keepers feed there Cresteds nothing but Crested Gecko Diet (CGD). I

prefer to provide my geckos with variety as I think no one item should make up 100% of an animal's diet. I also think the geckos enjoy variety as it keeps things interesting for them. I feed my crested every other day an alternating diet of CGD, and crickets often rotating between them. I dust all feeder insects in either Miner-all powder, Rep-Cal Herptivite multivitamin powder and/or a D3 calcium supplement. It is important to select the proper prey size and the general rule for selecting the proper size of crickets is the cricket should be no longer than the width of the gecko's head. For baby geckos this usually means 3/8" or smaller crickets and for juvenile geckos 1/2" crickets and adult geckos can handle 3/4" crickets. I also gut-load all feeder insects with cricket chow, potatoes, and collard greens; thus making them a lot more nutritious for your Geckos.

As a treat, I occasionally feed a blend of fresh fruit; the geckos really seem to enjoy this. This blend usually includes: Peaches, Apricots, Bananas, and Mangos. Baby and Juvenile Cresteds don't need to eat that much to survive so you may not notice the small amounts of food they are eating. If this is the case, don't panic, I have never had a crested die from starving itself, so as long as there is food available they will eventually eat. Though if you are absolutely certain your gecko is not eating or losing weight then I advise you to take the animal to the vet to see might not be a bigger problem at hand.

**Shedding:** Like all reptiles and amphibians, Cresteds shed their entire skin all at once. Babies shed more often than adults because as babies they outgrow their skin faster. It is not unusual to see Cresteds eat their entire skin during the process of shedding since it contains valuable nutritional components. Geckos can normally pull their shed off easily but sometimes they have issues if they do not have the proper humidity while shedding. You need to check your gecko after it has shed to make sure it was able to peel all the skin off, especially from their toes and tail. If not removed promptly from the toe or tail it can become cut off from its blood supply and in time can die and actually fall off. While it is not usually critical to the geckos health, your gecko was equipped with all its toes for a reason and this is easily preventable with your care.

Providing moist bedding will enable your gecko to have a high humidity location when it is shedding. Using moistened sphagnum moss or Zoo Med Forest Floor Bedding works well and both of these items are available in our bedding section. If your gecko has retained skin after shedding you can place the gecko in a small plastic container lined with warm, wet paper towels. With the top of the container on, let the gecko sit for approximately 30 minutes. The high humidity in the container should loosen the skin enough to allow you to remove it easily with a pair of tweezers. If the skin has not loosened enough reheat the paper towels with warm water and provide another 30 minute session. NEVER USE HOT WATER as this can burn your geckos' sensitive skin.

**Defense:** Crested geckos can and will drop their tails if threatened. The whole point is to confuse the predator with what just happened, so while the predator is trying to figure out what to make of the situation the gecko disappears. Unlike other geckos, Crested geckos do not regenerate their tails. If your gecko drops its tail, don't freak out, it is fairly normal and in matter of fact most wild Crested geckos are tailless. Many people believe tails are more of a hindrance to crested more than a benefit as their pelvises are not made to handle the weight of the tail, but nature is nature and there is always a plan. Cresteds are also semi-vocal. When housing numerous animals you will sometimes hear chirping or barking, don't worry, it's a natural response to alert the other animal they are uncomfortable with what is happening at the time or are ready to breed.

**Conclusion:** Crested Geckos have taken off since their rediscovery and are currently one of the most common pet geckos and justifiably so. They just come in so many colors and patterns it seems there is one out there for everyone. They will also give you years of enjoyment as they live up to 20 years in captivity so enjoy them; they will be a part of your family for many, many years.

