

Crested Gecko

(*Rhacodactylus ciliatus*)



Country of Origin	New Caledonia
Average Size	8-9 Inches
Temperament	Active, Handleable as Adults
Food Source	Livefood, Fruit
Experience Level	Beginner

This caresheet mentions specifically the crested gecko, *Rhacodactylus ciliatus*, but is also valid for any member of the Rhacodactylus family. The crested gecko is an attractive, lively arboreal gecko that is now widely bred in captivity, in a variety of different colours.

All of the Rhacodactylus geckos are native to one place only – the islands of New Caledonia and are nocturnal lizards that live in a rainforest environment, emerging around dusk. Crested geckos are one of the smaller species of the Rhacodactylus family, and grow up to 8 or 9 inches in length. Special pads on the feet allow them to climb almost any surface, including glass! These geckos also have a likewise pad on the tip of their prehensile tail, which is long and slender, helping with balance and stability. Some of these geckos can be vocal, and a keeper should not be alarmed by what may sound like “barking” or squeaking coming from their gecko. Others may never make a sound – so a silent gecko is not a bad sign either!

These geckos were presumed extinct, but rediscovered in 1994 and have since made a huge comeback into the pet industry, now being captive bred by hobbyists in increasing numbers. Because of their new discovery, their potential lifespan is unknown, but it is estimated to be between 10 and 20 years. Because of their hardy nature, large personalities and ease of care, these geckos have become well established, and are a good beginner species.

The ideal tank for this family would be one that is tall, and can withstand humid conditions, but is still well ventilated. Because of this, wooden vivariums are often inappropriate due to the fact that wood can rot, and fish tanks are both inappropriately sized, and lack ventilation. The new range of Exo Terra Glass & Mesh terrariums are absolutely perfect for these species. A 45 x 45 x 60cm would be ideal for an adult crested gecko, although juveniles can be housed in smaller, and groups of geckos should be housed in larger. Moss, earth or orchid bark can be used as a substrate. These geckos are not accurate hunters and can get mouth fulls of substrate, and it also needs to be kept humid, therefore sand or bark chips would be inappropriate. Many keepers have reported great success using soil based substrates and live plants in the vivarium – ficus and pothos being the two most popular plants that can be used.

The enclosure should be highly decorated, with many climbing, jumping and hiding places. Branches, logs, bark, caves, plastic or live plants should all be well utilised to create a secure rainforest environment. Whilst crested geckos do not need any specialist lighting, being nocturnal, if you wish to use live plants in a vivarium they will require full spectrum UVA lighting or the plants will die.

This gecko is a fairly cool species, room temperature is usually adequate most of the year round, although a heat mat can be maintained for harsh winters. The warm season in New Caledonia reaches the 80s, whilst the cool season maintains low at 60s. Crested geckos are more tolerant of low temperatures than high temperatures, and can go as low as 50s at night – but should never go higher than 80s. Humidity should be at least 70-80% and daily or twice daily spraying should be done to ensure the levels are kept high.

Crested Geckos are omnivores, and in the wild eat a variety of nectar, fruit and insects. In captivity they will take a wide range of livefoods, crickets, mealworms, locusts, waxworms, all of which should be calcium dusted. They will take small pieces of fruit, such as peach, nectarine, mango, apricot, banana, passionfruit, pear and other soft fruits. These can be pureed, mashed or chopped up very finely.