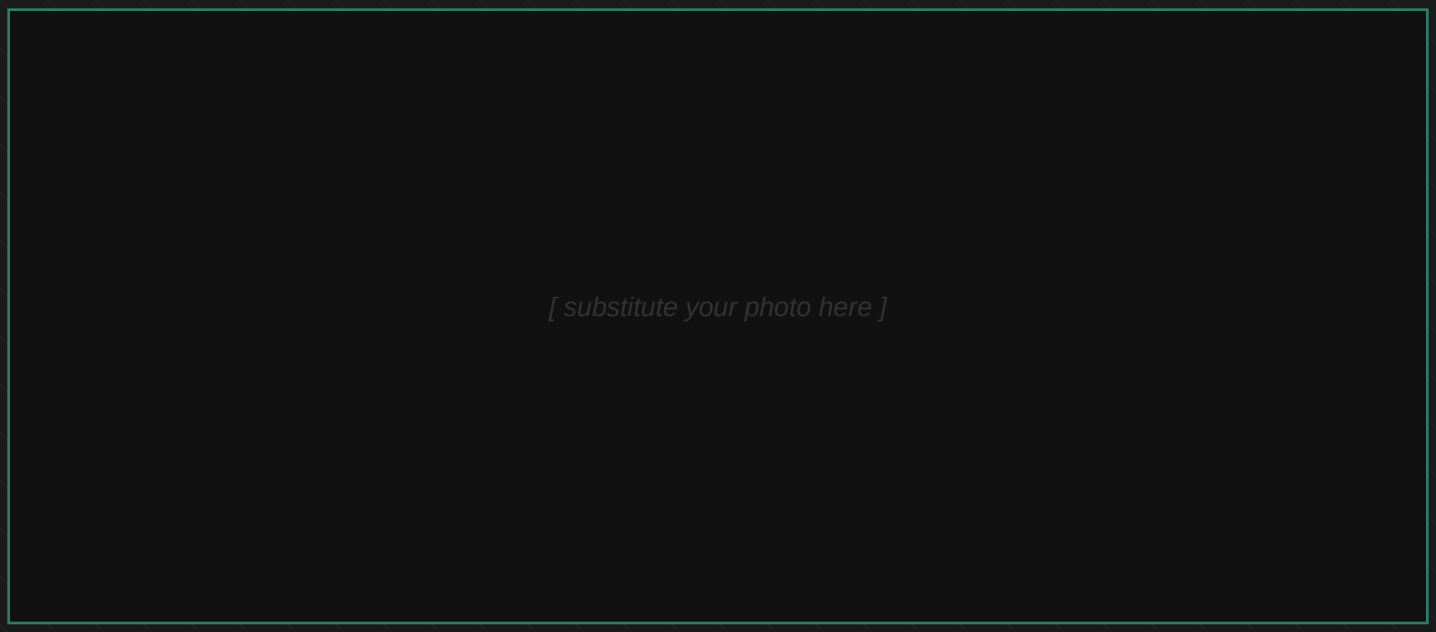

CRESTED GECKO

Correlophus ciliatus · Guichenot, 1866

Complete Keeper's Care Guide

BEGINNER FRIENDLY | **ARBOREAL** | **VULNERABLE (IUCN)**

ORIGIN	ADULT SIZE	LIFESPAN	TEMP RANGE	HUMIDITY
New Caledonia	6–8 inches	15–20+ years	72–82°F	60–80% RH

Crested Gecko Care Guide

Quick Facts

Scientific Name	Correlophus ciliatus (Guichenot, 1866)
Common Names	Crested Gecko, Eyelash Gecko, Crestie
Family	Diplodactylidae
Origin	Southern New Caledonia — Grande Terre & Isle of Pines
Habitat Type	Subtropical rainforest; low shrubs to mid-canopy trees
Adult Size	6–8 inches (15–20 cm) total length; 35–60 g
Lifespan	15–20+ years with proper care
Experience Level	Beginner — one of the most accessible reptile pets
Activity Pattern	Crepuscular / nocturnal
Temperament	Docile, curious, and tolerant of gentle handling
Venom	Non-venomous
Conservation Status	Vulnerable (IUCN 3.1) — captive population thriving

Natural History

The crested gecko is endemic to the South Province of New Caledonia, a semi-tropical archipelago situated between Fiji and Australia in the South Pacific. Wild populations occupy three disjunct areas: two on the main island of Grande Terre and one on the Isle of Pines and its surrounding islets. Within this range, crested geckos inhabit subtropical rainforest from sea level up to approximately 1,000 metres elevation, spending most of their time in low shrubs and small trees while descending closer to the ground to rest during daylight hours.

First described by Guichenot in 1866 under the name Correlophus ciliatus, the species was subsequently reclassified as Rhacodactylus ciliatus before being restored to its original genus following phylogenetic analysis in 2012. For decades after its original description, the crested gecko was believed to be extinct — it went unrecorded for over a century before being dramatically rediscovered in 1994 following a tropical storm that pushed field researchers into previously unexplored forest. This 'rediscovery' launched one of the most successful captive-breeding stories in modern herpetoculture.

New Caledonia experiences a warm, humid wet season from November through March, with temperatures peaking around 86°F (30°C), and a cooler, drier season from June through August where temperatures settle around 72°F (22°C). Annual rainfall can reach 120 inches, creating a genuinely tropical environment. Understanding these seasonal rhythms matters in captivity — the species is adapted to a moderate temperature band and is acutely sensitive to overheating. Today, the IUCN lists the species as Vulnerable due to ongoing habitat loss and fragmentation; the large, healthy captive population plays an important role in reducing collection pressure on wild animals.

Housing

Enclosure Type & Size

Because crested geckos are arboreal, vertical space matters far more than floor area. The enclosure must be tall enough to allow the natural climbing and jumping behaviours that keep these animals physically and mentally well. A glass terrarium with front-opening doors and a well-ventilated top panel is the preferred format; wooden enclosures are generally unsuitable because the humidity requirements required for this species will cause warping and harbour bacteria over time.

Hatchling / Juvenile (under 10 g)	10–12 gallon upright or a 12" x 12" x 18" enclosure — smaller spaces help juveniles locate food and reduce stress
Sub-Adult (10–25 g)	18" x 18" x 24" minimum
Adult (25 g and over)	18" x 18" x 36" absolute minimum; 24" x 24" x 48" strongly preferred — healthy geckos use every inch

Housing note: Crested geckos are solitary and territorial, particularly males. House all individuals separately. Cohabitation, even between females, can lead to competition, resource stress, and injury. The only exception is short-duration, supervised breeding introductions.

Substrate

A moisture-retaining substrate is essential both for maintaining enclosure humidity and for the gecko's comfort. Organic topsoil, coconut fibre coir, or a bioactive mix of these blended with orchid bark are all effective options. A depth of 2–3 inches allows the substrate to act as a humidity buffer between misting sessions while resisting rapid drying. Clumps of live or preserved sphagnum moss placed on the surface add additional humidity retention and create natural micro-environments. Avoid loose fine-particle substrates such as calcium sand, play sand, or plain reptile bark chips, as these do not retain humidity adequately and can be accidentally ingested.

Hides & Enrichment

Crested geckos naturally spend daylight hours concealed in dense vegetation or bark crevices at low to mid-canopy height. Provide at least two to three hides placed at varying heights within the enclosure — one near the top and one nearer the ground. Cork bark tubes, hollow bamboo sections, and commercial reptile caves all work well. Abundant coverage via live or artificial foliage is equally important: these geckos need to feel hidden even when visible, which reduces stress and encourages natural behaviour. Horizontal branches, cork flats, and trailing vine arrangements give the gecko the variety of perching surfaces it would encounter in the wild.

Temperature & Lighting

Temperature

This is where crested gecko care differs most sharply from many commonly kept reptiles. Crested geckos do not require or tolerate the high temperatures used for desert species. They thrive in a moderate ambient range and are at genuine risk of heat stress at temperatures above 85°F (29°C). Prolonged exposure to these levels can be fatal.

Ambient Day (cool end)	72–75°F / 22–24°C

Ambient Day (warm end)	78–82°F / 25–28°C
Night Drop	65–72°F / 18–22°C (natural and beneficial)
Absolute Maximum	85°F / 29°C — do not exceed; heat stress risk above this
Heating Method	Low-wattage ceramic heat emitter or a small halogen basking bulb on a thermostat; ceramic heat emitter for overnight if needed

Important: Many keepers in temperate climates can maintain crested geckos at room temperature year-round without any supplemental heating, provided the ambient temperature stays above 68°F (20°C). Always verify with a calibrated digital thermometer — not an adhesive strip gauge, which is unreliable.

Lighting

Crested geckos are crepuscular and nocturnal but benefit from a consistent photoperiod that mirrors natural day length. A 12-hour on / 12-hour off cycle is a solid baseline, shifting toward 14 hours of light in summer months and 10 hours in winter for keepers who wish to follow seasonal cycling, particularly for breeding. Full-spectrum or low-level UVB lighting is not strictly required for survival, but current research supports its value for regulating circadian rhythms, improving appetite, and boosting overall condition. If UVB is used, a low-output T5 HO bulb (UVB 5.0 or equivalent) is appropriate. Do not use coloured night lights — red, blue, or black lamps disrupt the gecko's natural day/night cycle and should be avoided entirely.

Humidity

Target Range	60–80% relative humidity
Misting Frequency	Once or twice daily — mist heavily in the evening when the gecko becomes active; allow the enclosure to partially dry between sessions
Monitoring	Digital hygrometer placed at mid-enclosure height; do not rely on analogue gauges
Dry Periods	Essential — the enclosure should not remain fully saturated; the wet/dry cycle prevents mould, bacterial growth, and respiratory issues

Maintaining proper humidity is critical for shedding, hydration, and general health. Crested geckos also drink water droplets from the enclosure walls and foliage after misting, so adequate misting is also their primary water source. However, a permanently saturated enclosure is harmful — allow the humidity to drop to the 50–60% range between misting cycles. A combination of moisture-retaining substrate, ample live or artificial foliage, and regular misting is usually sufficient to maintain this balance without additional equipment. For keepers in drier climates, an automated misting system on a timer takes the guesswork out of consistency.

Feeding

Commercial Crested Gecko Diet (CGD)

The development of commercial crested gecko diet (CGD) powders was transformative for this species in captivity. Brands such as Pangea and Repashy have produced complete, nutritionally balanced powdered diets specifically formulated for Correlophus ciliatus and related species. These products are mixed with water to a smooth paste and offered in a small dish every two to three days. A quality CGD can serve as the sole dietary staple — this is one of the very few reptile species for which this is genuinely true — though supplementing with live insects provides important nutritional variety and behavioural enrichment. Avoid baby food, fruit-only diets, or generic lizard foods that are not specifically formulated as complete crested gecko diets.

Live Insects

Insects introduce animal protein, activity-based enrichment, and feeding stimulation that CGD alone cannot fully replicate. Suitable prey items include dubia roaches, crickets, black soldier fly larvae, and silkworms. All feeder insects must be properly gut-loaded on high-quality food for at least 24 hours before offering, then dusted with a calcium supplement at the majority of feedings and a multivitamin supplement twice monthly. Prey size should not exceed the width of the gecko's head. High-fat species such as waxworms and butterworms should be used only as occasional treats due to their addictive nature and risk of causing dietary obesity.

Hatchling (0–3 months)	CGD offered nightly; very small feeder insects daily if accepted — pinhead crickets or small BSFL
Juvenile (3–12 months)	CGD every 2–3 days; insects 3–5 times per week; gut-loaded and dusted
Sub-Adult / Adult	CGD every 2–3 days; insects 1–2 times per week
Calcium Supplement	Dust insects at nearly every feeding; use plain calcium or calcium with D3

Multivitamin	Dust insects twice monthly
Remove uneaten CGD	After 24 hours to prevent bacterial growth

Water

Crested geckos primarily hydrate by licking water droplets from enclosure walls, branches, and foliage following misting. This behaviour is instinctive — always mist in the evening when the gecko is naturally active so it can drink before the droplets evaporate. A small, shallow water dish (bottle cap depth) can also be kept in the enclosure as a supplemental water source and to support ambient humidity. Refresh the dish every two to three days and scrub it weekly to prevent bacterial biofilm. Use dechlorinated or filtered water for both misting and the water dish.

Handling

Crested geckos are among the most handleable reptile species available to hobbyists. They are docile by nature, rarely bite, and most individuals tame down quickly with regular, calm interaction. That said, all handling carries inherent risk and should be approached with awareness — crested geckos are agile jumpers and will leap if startled. Always handle over a low surface or while seated. Support the gecko's full body at all times and allow it to walk from hand to hand rather than gripping it. Never grasp a crested gecko by the tail; like all lizards, they can autotomize (voluntarily shed) the tail as a defence response. Unlike many geckos, crested geckos do not regenerate the tail — loss is permanent, though the animal suffers no lasting harm from the 'frog-butt' result.

New gecko protocol: Do not attempt handling for the first 10–14 days after acquisition. Allow the gecko to fully settle, establish feeding, and recognise its enclosure as safe territory before adding the additional stimulus of handling. Sessions of 5–10 minutes are sufficient; watch for signs of stress such as rapid breathing, hiding attempts, or colour darkening (geckos 'fire up' when stressed or highly active — a normal darkening of their pattern).

Shedding

Signs of an Approaching Shed

As a shed approaches, the gecko's colours will appear dull or washed out, and the skin may develop a slightly greyish or papery texture. Appetite often decreases in the days before a shed, which is entirely normal. The eyes may appear clouded. Juveniles shed frequently — sometimes every few weeks during rapid growth phases — while adults shed less regularly.

During & After the Shed

Crested geckos typically consume their shed skin completely, so finding shed skin in the enclosure is uncommon. The entire process usually concludes within a few hours. Ensure humidity is at the upper end of the target range (70–80%) during and around shedding periods to facilitate a clean, complete shed. Do not assist the shedding process unless retained shed has been present for more than 24 hours on sensitive areas such as toes or tail. Retained shed on the digits can constrict blood flow and lead to toe loss — if noted, a 15–20 minute soak in shallow lukewarm water will usually soften the shed enough to remove it gently with damp cotton swabs. Never force dry skin off.

Morphs & Colour Variation

Crested gecko genetics differ significantly from ball pythons and leopard geckos. Rather than a system of clearly defined dominant, recessive, and co-dominant mutations, crested gecko coloration is largely polygenic — driven by the interaction of multiple genes and environmental factors including incubation conditions. This makes predicting offspring appearance more complex, but also means the species naturally produces extraordinary variety. Wild-type animals range from light tan to dark brown; selective captive breeding has greatly extended the palette.

Common pattern categories include: Patternless (solid colour throughout), Tiger (lateral banding), Flame (contrasting dorsal stripe against a darker base), Harlequin (high-contrast mottled patterning), Pinstripe (raised, cream-coloured dorsal scale rows that form a stripe), Dalmatian (dark spots scattered across the body), and Lily White (a dominant mutation producing reduced pigmentation, often used in combination with other patterns). Cream, orange, red, yellow, olive, near-black, and combinations of these all appear regularly in reputable breeding programmes.

Health & Common Issues

Retained Shed	Caused by humidity too low; toes and tail most at risk. Soak and assist as described in the shedding section.
Metabolic Bone Disease (MBD)	Caused by calcium deficiency or insufficient D3. Presents as jaw softness, tremors, limb deformity. Prevent with consistent calcium supplementation.
Respiratory Infection (RI)	Caused by chronically low temperatures or constantly saturated enclosures. Signs: wheezing, mucus at nostrils, open-mouth breathing. Veterinary treatment required.
Floppy Tail Syndrome	Tail flops over the back when the gecko rests head-down; believed to be caused by insufficient horizontal perching surfaces. Offer more flat perches.
Heat Stress	Caused by temperatures exceeding 85°F. Emergency: move the enclosure to a cooler location immediately and mist lightly.
Obesity	High-fat feeder overuse and excess CGD portions. Monitor body weight; a healthy adult feels firm but not distended.
Parasites	Mites and internal parasites are possible in wild-caught individuals. Source only from reputable captive-bred stock; quarantine all new animals.
Salmonella	As with all reptiles, crested geckos can carry Salmonella. Wash hands thoroughly before and after all handling and enclosure maintenance.

Breeding

Crested geckos are one of the most approachable reptile species to breed in captivity, which has driven the diversity of the captive gene pool and contributed significantly to conservation by reducing wild-collection demand. Females should reach a minimum weight of 35–40 grams before being considered for breeding to protect their long-term health through repeated egg production. Only pair males with females; never house multiple males together.

Introducing a cool, dry winter period (temperature dropping to 65–68°F / 18–20°C with reduced photoperiod for 6–8 weeks) stimulates breeding behaviour when conditions return to normal, though many captive pairs breed without a formal cooling period. Males become visibly active and vocally 'chirp' when introduced to a female's enclosure for

supervised pairing sessions.

Clutch Size	2 eggs per clutch; a healthy female may produce 6–10 clutches per season
Egg Incubation	65–75°F (18–24°C); incubation at room temperature is standard practice for this species
Incubation Period	60–120 days depending on temperature — cooler temperatures extend incubation
Egg Medium	Slightly damp vermiculite, perlite, or commercial reptile incubation substrate
Hatchling Size	Approximately 3–4 inches; offer micro-prey and CGD from the first week
Female Recovery	Provide extra calcium and allow recovery periods between clutches; monitor body weight closely

This guide was compiled using commonly accepted husbandry practices from experienced keepers and industry-standard reptile care resources. | GrimSerpents.com · May 2026