

Care & Husbandry for Crested Geckos

Provided by the Dallas-Fort Worth Herpetological Society



What is it?

Crested geckos are relatively small lizards with amazing eyes, spiny-looking “crests” and very soft skin. With a little knowledge and care, they are easy to keep. Wild crested geckos are not exported for the pet trade, but captive-bred specimens are widely available.

Description

These geckos grow to about 8-10 inches total length. Two rows of pointed scales run from above the eyes and down the back. They have adhesive toe pads that allow them to climb smooth surfaces (even glass). The tail can be easily broken off if accidentally grabbed or pinched, and if lost, the tail does not grow back. The eyes are covered by a membrane but they do not have eyelids, and so the gecko periodically cleans and moistens the eye by licking. The vertical pupil closes to a slit in what we would consider normal light - these lizards are active at night (nocturnal). The scales covering the body are very small, resulting in a very soft feeling when you touch or hold one. The skin is reasonably tough and should not tear with gentle handling.

Where they live

They originated from New Caledonia, a group of islands located northeast of Australia. There, they live in low-elevation rainforests, often inhabiting tree canopies 10 to 50 feet above the forest floor. Their habitat tends to be shaded, humid (about 80% relative humidity), and moderately warm.

Life span

This gecko was rediscovered in 1994 after being thought extinct, and so with only about 15 years' experience with them, it is not clear how long they may live. However, it is thought that they may live as much as 15 to 20 years.

Enclosure needed

The cage for a crested gecko should recreate some of the features of their natural environment: height, hiding



spaces, warmth, and humidity. It can be very rewarding to set up a natural-looking terrarium with branches and plants (washable silk plants are a good choice). Arrange some of the branches vertically to allow for climbing, and provide leaves so that your gecko can hide and feel protected. The lizard will probably climb the sides of the terrarium, too, so make sure there is an escape-proof top (such as a wire mesh screen). Provide a small, shallow water dish, as babies could drown in a deeper one. A good substrate for the floor is Bed-A-Beast (ground coconut shell); as an alternative, some suggest a mixture of peat-based potting soil with some orchid bark and sand. Spray a mist of water into the cage daily, to keep the humidity high and to allow the gecko to lick droplets of water.

Crested geckos do not need special lighting like some other lizards do. They are nocturnal and they live in vegetation, and will want to avoid bright sunlight. Also, these geckos need moderate (not hot) temperatures. They do well at temperatures in the middle to upper 70's (°F) and should not be exposed to temperatures above 85°F. *Be careful not to place a terrarium where it will receive a lot of direct sunlight. Sunlight can make a glass-enclosed space very hot.*

If you keep more than one gecko, make sure there is only one male per group, as male crested geckos are territorial and will likely harass or even attack each other.

Diet

In the wild, it appears that these geckos eat insects and soft fruit. Accordingly, many people feed their crested geckos crickets and fruit baby food (apricot or peach). These foods need to be supplemented with vitamins and minerals, by gut-loading crickets and mixing a little reptile vitamin & calcium supplement in the baby food (and dusting crickets with it). In our collection, feeding occurs every other day with either fruit or live insects. Additionally, a commercial crested gecko food is available that is advertised as being sufficient nutrition by itself.

Handling

Crested geckos can tolerate regular handling and will become fairly calm and adjusted to handling. They rarely or never bite, but if one does nip you, it does not particularly hurt. Even when adjusted to handling, keep in mind that the lizard requires constant monitoring to insure that it does not wander - or jump - away or accidentally get hurt. A fall of only a foot or two can seriously hurt or kill the gecko, so handle it close to you (so that if they jump, they will jump toward you) or near a soft surface.

Initially, handle the gecko in short sessions, and be prepared for it to jump from your hand. You can let it hop from one of your hands to your other hand, and then move the free hand to the front so that the gecko has a target for its next jump. **Be careful** and remember that the tail is fairly easily broken off. You can gently restrain the gecko, but do not squeeze it and keep the restraint to a minimum.

These are not pets for young children who may not use good judgment in handling and monitoring them!

As with other reptiles, good hygiene practices are necessary after handling and cage-cleaning. Reptiles can carry the *Salmonella* bacteria, which can give you an uncomfortable gastrointestinal illness and may pose a serious risk to young children and those with compromised immune systems. Wash your hands with soap and water after handling and cage-cleaning, and do not let young children handle the gecko. Do not wash the cage or bowls around food preparation areas.

Common health concerns

As noted earlier, use care in handling to avoid breaking off of the tail. Additionally, these geckos must not be kept too warm and the substrate should be moist but not actually wet.

If a crested gecko becomes emaciated-looking, inactive when handled, or is not feeding, contact a veterinarian with experience in treating reptiles.

Breeding

Crested geckos are easily bred in captivity. If you want to breed your crested geckos, it is recommended that you read further (start with the care sheets and book shown below). Determining the sex of these geckos is very difficult until they grow to over 3 inches in head-to-vent length. Around that size, males begin to show hemipenal bulges (at the base of the tail). Males also begin to show pre-anal pores, although these are very difficult to see without magnification.

Females lay two eggs per clutch, and the female may become gravid again soon after laying. If you are keeping breeding females, make sure to provide extra calcium since egg production may deplete their supply of this vital nutrient.

Legal restrictions/permits needed

No importation is allowed. There are not restrictions and no permits required for owners.

For more information

Other care sheets are available on the Internet at:

<http://www.pangeareptile.com>

<http://www.ciliatus.com>

Robbie Hamper (2003) *The crested gecko in captivity*. ECO Publishing