Crested Gecko Care Guide

Correlophus ciliatus

Provide usable height, dense cover, horizontal resting branches and a complete gecko diet. Allow surfaces to dry partly between hydration cycles while maintaining sheltered humid microhabitats.

Species Profile

Common name: Crested Gecko

Scientific name: *Correlophus ciliatus*

Adult size: 7-9 in (18-23 cm) total length when tailed

Average lifespan: 15-20 years

Native range: Southern Grande Terre, New Caledonia

Habitat and activity: Nocturnal/crepuscular; forest and shrub climbing habitats

Diet: Nutritionally complete crested-gecko diet plus insects

Care difficulty: Beginner to Intermediate

Shopping List

- Secure enclosure at least 18 × 18 × 36 in (46 × 46 × 91 cm; L × W × H) for one adult; see Housing for exceptions and group arrangements.
- Digital thermometers for different zones; a suitable hygrometer; timer for a consistent day/night cycle.
- Species-appropriate substrate and multiple stable hides or covered retreats.
- Reliable supply of the staple foods described below, clean feeding tools and a transport container.
- Appropriate overhead heat source if required, controlled by a compatible thermostat; infrared thermometer for surfaces.
- Appropriate visible lighting and, where recommended below, a linear UVB fixture with measured shade and exposure zones.
- Fresh-water dish or cup; insect supplements when applicable; a scale appropriate to the animal's size.

Housing

Our recommended starting adult enclosure is 18 × 18 × 36 in (46 × 46 × 91 cm; L × W × H) for one animal. Larger usable space is encouraged. These dimensions are a husbandry recommendation, not a species-specific experimentally proven threshold.

Fill the height with firmly secured horizontal and diagonal branches, cork, foliage and sheltered paths. Provide several resting places at different heights and enough cover to travel between environmental zones without crossing a bare open box.

Juveniles may use a furnished adult enclosure when food intake, hydration and waste can be monitored. A temporary grow-out enclosure should still offer choice and cover. Quarantine newcomers separately with dedicated tools and a substrate that permits health monitoring; arrange veterinary assessment for unknown-origin animals.

RED ROCKS EXOTIC REPTILES

Lighting & UVB

Provide roughly 10-12 hours of visible daylight followed by darkness. A measured UV Index (UVI) around 0.5-1.0 at the most exposed usable site, declining to near zero inside retreats, is our conservative starting recommendation. Low-level UVB is recommended when a usable gradient can be provided; nocturnal activity alone is not a reason to exclude light.

Measure exposure at the animal's back height with an appropriate UVI meter, such as a Solarmeter 6.5. Lamp percentage, wattage and a fixed distance alone do not establish exposure: reflectors, mesh, perch height, plant growth and lamp age change output. Keep glass/plastic out of the UV path, follow fixture safety instructions and provide complete shade. Replace or reassess lamps according to measured output and manufacturer guidance.

Heating & Temperature

- Localized basking surface: 80-82°F (27-28°C).
- Cool-zone air: 70-75°F (21-24°C).
- Nighttime air: 65-72°F (18-22°C) for healthy established animals.

Create the gradient on one side rather than heating every hide to the same temperature. Use a compatible thermostat on each heat source; a manual lamp dimmer does not replace thermostatic protection. Secure the probe and verify temperatures independently: probe thermometers measure air/retreat temperature, while an infrared thermometer measures exposed surfaces.

Use appropriately guarded overhead warmth when needed. Keep animals clear of hot fixtures, avoid heat rocks, and switch visible lights off at night. Night heat is needed only when the room falls below the appropriate range; use a thermostat-controlled lightless source if necessary.

Do not allow the whole enclosure to approach the warm-site temperature. Sustained mid-80s°F (about 29°C) air is a warning for these setups; heat-sensitive individuals may need intervention sooner. Keep a cooler refuge available and respond to prolonged heat avoidance.

Humidity & Ventilation

50-70% during drying; brief rises to 80-90% after misting. Treat readings as a starting pattern rather than a number to chase regardless of substrate, airflow or animal behavior.

Measure humidity in a representative occupied zone, away from a freshly sprayed surface. Provide sheltered moisture choices while retaining airflow. Persistent condensation, sour odor, flooded soil or surfaces that never dry indicate a setup problem. Ventilation and hydration must be adjusted together rather than simply sealing all vents.

Water & Hydration

Provide a clean, appropriately shallow dish or accessible elevated water cup at all times. Change it daily and immediately when soiled; wash it regularly with dedicated tools. Potable water is generally suitable, with treatment where local water quality requires it.

For animals that drink droplets, mist foliage or suitable surfaces at the time they become active, then allow partial drying. Droplets supplement the dish; water chemistry claims should be based on evidence rather than a species' trade name.

Substrate

Because crested geckos are arboreal (tree-dwelling), they don't spend much time on the ground. The substrate is primarily used to catch feces and waste, as well as cushion the gecko in the event of a fall. An easy DIY substrate is a mix of 40% organic top soil, 40% coco coir fiber and 20% untreated sphagnum moss. As a bonus, add a generous layer of cleaned leaf litter on top.

Feces and urates should be removed daily, and contaminated substrate should be scooped out and replaced. The substrate should be completely replaced once every 1-3 months, depending on your needs.

Food & Feeding

Crested geckos are omnivores, which means that they need a balanced diet of both plant and insect-based foods to get the nutrition that they need. As pets, it's best to feed them a specially-formulated, high-quality crested gecko diet plus live insects. Crested gecko diet (CGD) is a nutritionally-complete powder that becomes a meal replacement smoothie when water is added.

Typically any store bought CGD will be sufficient for your crested gecko. Crickets and dubia roaches will be the primary feeder insect for your gecko, with mealworms and small hornworms being an occasional treat.

How often crested geckos need to eat depends on age:

Hatchlings and Juveniles (0-12 months) - CGD daily, insects 1-2x/week

Adults (>12 months) - CGD every 2-3 days, insects 1x/week

Supplements

A genuinely complete commercial gecko diet should be mixed exactly as directed and usually needs no extra calcium or vitamins added to it. Lightly supplement separately offered insects according to a compatible program. Extra powders can unbalance a complete diet.

Coordinate dietary D3 with measured UVB and the diet’s existing vitamin content. Use a balanced reptile multivitamin only where the insect/diet program calls for it; follow label directions and avoid combining multiple high-dose products.

Decor & Enrichment

Decorations play a vital role in your crested gecko's enclosure as environmental enrichment. Enrichment items encourage exercise, stimulate your pet's natural instincts, and help promote overall wellbeing. Good decor can include but is not limited to: Hanging coconut hides, vines, branches, bamboo shoots, artificial leaves, small log hides, etc.

Handling & Behavior

Let the animal settle and feed consistently before brief optional handling. Support the body, work low over a safe surface and stop when repeated retreat, escape attempts or defensive behavior show stress. Never lift a lizard by its tail.

Avoid handling immediately after meals, during difficult sheds or when unwell. Wash hands and use dedicated equipment to reduce disease transfer.

Cleaning & Routine Maintenance

Daily: check the animal's access to water/appropriate moisture, temperatures, visible condition and equipment. Remove feces, contaminated material, dead feeders and spoiled food promptly.

Regularly: clean dishes and feeding surfaces, check thermostats and probes, inspect decor stability and maintain ventilation. Bioactive systems still require waste checks, food removal, plant care and drainage maintenance; they are not self-cleaning.

Record appetite, activity, shed history and weight or body condition when safe. Arrange veterinary assessment for unexplained changes. Quarantine new animals with dedicated tools, and disinfect only with a suitable product used at the label dilution/contact time, then rinse and dry as required before return.

Cohabitation

Individual housing is the safest routine default. Shared housing can cause food competition, injury or reproductive pressure even without obvious fighting. Never assume a male/female pair or female group is compatible. Breeding introductions belong in a planned specialist program with separate backup enclosures and individual monitoring.

Shedding & Seasonal Changes

Maintain access to a clean humid retreat and inspect toes, tail tip and eyes after shedding when observation is possible. Do not peel retained skin or apply oils/adhesives. Persistent constriction, damaged tissue or repeated failed sheds warrants veterinary help.

Seasonal changes in appetite or activity can occur. Check temperatures, hydration and weight before treating prolonged refusal as normal. Deliberate brumation or breeding cycles require healthy animals and species-specific preparation; pet care does not require forcing a seasonal shutdown.

Reproduction

Mature females may develop eggs, including infertile eggs without a current male. Provide a suitable moist laying retreat or substrate access, monitor body condition and nutrition, and seek veterinary advice for prolonged straining, swelling or decline. Breeding, incubation and offspring rearing require a prepared species-specific program.

Common Health Concerns

- Poor body condition or feeding decline: check the full gradient, hydration and food quality; arrange assessment for persistent refusal accompanied by weight loss.
- Calcium/vitamin imbalance: weakness, tremors, a soft or misshapen jaw or abnormal limbs require veterinary assessment; extra high-dose supplements are not a substitute for diagnosis.
- Skin, shed or injury problems: repeated retained skin, wounds, swelling or abnormal discoloration deserve prompt attention.

- Respiratory or systemic illness: labored/open-mouth breathing at rest, marked lethargy, loss of balance, persistent diarrhea or rapid deterioration require an experienced exotic veterinarian.