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Puerto Rico Crested Anole (*Anolis cristatellus*)

Miniature “Sailfin Dragons”

The Puerto Rico crested anole is also known as simply the Puerto Rican anole. Native to Puerto Rico, and the U.S. and British Virgin Islands, as well as a several other neotropical locations, crested anoles have been introduced into a few other locations in the U.S., where they are believed to compete with native green anoles and other lizard species. These anoles range from light to dark brown, blackish, grayish brown, to tan or reddish brown with a distinct, raised sail on the tail and pelvic region, leading to their name. The dewlap is olive-green to yellowish, or orangish, and males may also develop a low crest and dorsal ridge as well. As with other anoles, their dewlap is a loose, expandable section of skin and scales located on their throat and neck in which males will signal to indicate territory. Many species of anoles will also display other physical behaviors such as head bobbing and “push-ups” to display dominance, territory, and/or social structure as well. These anoles also have some color changing ability depending on their thermoregulatory state, social structure, and current disposition. As with many other lizard species, crested anoles can also drop their tails through caudal autotomy, which momentarily startles and/or distracts the potential predator long enough for the lizard to make an escape. A new tail regenerates after several weeks, although it is somewhat more vestigial than the original. These large, active anoles can make for very hardy, inexpensive, and personable pets to maintain for someone looking for a small lizard with a big personality and appearance!

Taxonomy

Life: All living, physical, and animate entities

Domain: Eukaryota

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum/Sub Phylum: Chordata/Vertebrata

Class: Reptilia

Order: Squamata

Suborder: Lacertilia

Infraorder: Iguania

Family: Dactyloidae

Genus: Anolis

Species: *Anolis cristatellus**

*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.

Lifespan and Longevity

Crested anoles may attain longevity of 5 to 6 years or slightly more under the proper care.

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Distribution and Habitat

This anole species is indigenous to Puerto Rico, the U.S. and British Virgin Islands, and surrounding islands, but is also introduced elsewhere including south Florida, Costa Rica, Hispaniola, and Dominica. It can occupy a variety of terrestrial to low semi-arboreal environments, often in and around residential areas and other human habitations.

Conservation Status

Not Evaluated for the IUCN Red List (NE) or otherwise Data Deficient (DD), but likely Least Concern (LC).

Legal and Regulatory Status(*Subject to Change)

Consult with your local, municipal, and state ordinances and regulations for any ownership restrictions.

Experience Level Required

Novice/Beginner to Intermediate/Moderate.

Size

Puerto Rican crested anoles reach 7 to 8 ½ inches as adults.

Housing and Enclosure

Provide a sturdy and secure enclosure that is escape proof. A minimum of a 20 to 30 gallon tall glass or other enclosure should be provided for these active, and arboreal anoles. Use a substrate that can retain moderate levels of humidity such as slightly dampened peat moss, untreated potting soil, orchid bark substrates, or sphagnum moss. These anoles are arboreal lizards that will appreciate added climbing, basking, and hiding opportunities including natural or artificial foliage, rocks, vines, or branches. These anoles can be misted periodically for humidity and hydration or can be provided a shallow water dish that can be cleaned and replaced regularly at least two to three times weekly.

Temperature, Lighting, and Humidity

Create a sufficient day/night thermal gradient with full spectrum UVA/UVB lighting with ambient temperatures in the low 80's to mid-90 for a basking spot during the day, and mid 60 to mid 70 degrees F at night. Providing the correct amounts of UVA/UVB overhead incandescent and florescent lighting, and calcium-to-phosphorus ratios is essential for ensuring the health and overall well-being of crested anoles in captivity. Without UVA/UVB, or adequate amounts of it, they can be susceptible to the abnormal bone growth and development known as Metabolic Bone Disease (MBD), and other health and development maladies. Also be sure to spot clean the enclosure for urates, feces, or uneaten food at least twice per week. Be sure to periodically replace the substrate, clean, and disinfect the enclosure and its furnishings at minimum every 2 to 3 months. More specific lighting, heating, and humidity product suggestions and recommendations that can best suit one's needs, as well as those of one's animals can be given as well.

Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition

Insectivorous; Crested anoles are primarily insectivorous in the wild, feeding on insects and other small invertebrates. In captivity, feed crested anoles a variety of appropriately sized feeder insects such as crickets, roaches, mealworms, superworms, and waxworms. Feeder insects should be gut-loaded in order to increase their optimal nutritional value. These anoles also require additional calcium and vitamin D3 supplementation 1 to 2 times weekly or as otherwise directed for optimal health and development. This is in order to prevent Metabolic Bone Disease

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(MBD) and other growth and nutritional deficiencies. Their feeding frequency will depend on the age, size, and overall health of your animal. Use care as to not overfeed them, as obesity and other health related issues can become an issue. More specific dietary and supplementary product suggestions and recommendations that can best suit one's needs, as well as those of one's animals can be given as well.

Handling

Puerto Rican crested anoles are active and delicate lizards that may tolerate some levels of handling and can become very bold and personable. These lizards can also drop their tails if handled roughly as well, however. Handle these lizards with care whenever possible. These large anoles also make a great display species as well.

****Also be sure to practice basic cleanliness and hygiene associated with proper husbandry after touching or handling any animals or animal enclosures to prevent the possibility of contracting salmonellosis or any other zoonotic pathogens****

Contact

Authored by Eric Roscoe. For any additional questions, comments, and/or concerns regarding this animal, group of animals, or this care sheet, please email and contact the Madison Area Herpetological Society at info@madisonherps.org

Disclaimer: Note that the information provided in these, or any care sheets, are not intended to be all-exhaustive, and further research and care should always be sought and provided when it comes to any species one may prospectively be interested in. These care sheets are also not intended to serve as substitutes for professional veterinary medical care and husbandry should any animal require it. Always seek proper and professional veterinary care for any animal should the need arise, and be prepared ahead of time for any and all husbandry costs and expenses that may occur with any animal beyond the initial purchase. Any animal owned is ultimately a matter of personal/individual care and responsibility. MAHS cannot make any claims or guarantees regarding any information in this care sheet therein. This care sheet may be reprinted or redistributed only in its entirety, including any and all MAHS logos and disclaimers.

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