

# Species Fact Sheets

**Order:** Gruiformes  
**Scientific Name:** *Cariama cristata*

**Family:** Cariamidae  
**Common Name:** Red-legged seriema

**AZA Management:**  Green  Yellow  Red  None

**Photo (Male):** Red-legged seriemas are identical in plumage although males are slightly larger and heavier and have taller crests. Most adult red-legged seriemas average between 2.5–3 kg (5.5–6.6 lb). Confirmation of sex should be confirmed via DNA.



**Photo (Female):** Photo Credit Josh Caraballo



## NATURAL HISTORY:

**Geographic Range:** Europe  Asia  North America  Neotropical   
 Africa  Australia  Other

**Habitat:** Forest  Desert  Grassland  Coastal   
 Riverine  Montane  Other  [Click here to enter text.](#)

**Circadian Cycle:** Diurnal  Crepuscular  Nocturnal  Other  [Click here to enter text.](#)

To 70° F  To 60° F  To 50° F  To 40° F

**Cold Tolerance:** To 30° F  To 20° F  Other

Zoos in zones where temperatures fall below 0 °C (32 °F) should have winter holding facilities available for housing birds during inclement weather. Seriemas have succumbed to frostbite, and should be locked in heated shelters when temperatures are below 0 °C (32 °F). They should also be housed indoors during

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periods of freezing rain or snow as their loose plumage does not provide them adequate protection from such weather conditions.

|                        |           |                          |          |   |          |                          |          |                                     |
|------------------------|-----------|--------------------------|----------|---|----------|--------------------------|----------|-------------------------------------|
|                        | To 30° F  | <input type="checkbox"/> | To 50° F | <input type="checkbox"/>  | To 70° F | <input type="checkbox"/> | To 90° F | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| <b>Heat Tolerance:</b> | To 110° F | <input type="checkbox"/> | Other    | During warm parts of the year and in warmer climates, shaded areas should be made available both on the ground and from above in the form of perching. Seriemas exhibiting heat stress will pant, and the ability to retreat to cooler areas of the pen is critical. Areas of full sun should be provided within seriema exhibits, as seriemas are frequent sunbathers. Sunning occurs on the ground, generally in areas with sandy substrate. Sunning seriemas often appear as if they are dead, so good exhibit interpretation is recommended to avoid “dead bird” reports. |          |                          |          |                                     |
|                        |           | <input type="checkbox"/> |          |   |          |                          |          |                                     |

|              |           |                          |           |                                     |           |                          |                   |                                     |
|--------------|-----------|--------------------------|-----------|-------------------------------------|-----------|--------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <b>Diet:</b> | Frugivore | <input type="checkbox"/> | Carnivore | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Piscivore | <input type="checkbox"/> | Insectivore       | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
|              | Nectivore | <input type="checkbox"/> | Omnivore  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Folivore  | <input type="checkbox"/> | Other (Add Below) | <input type="checkbox"/>            |

### Captive Dietary Needs:

From the limited data available, it appears that although seriemas are omnivorous, their dietary habits may be primarily insectivorous/carnivorous. Seriemas may be best adapted for an omnivorous/insectivorous feeding strategy. Small mice, raw meat, insects, egg, commercially available avian pellets are most commonly fed. Consult AZA Red-legged seriema Animal Care Manual for further information on dietary needs.

|                                     |        |                           |          |                           |
|-------------------------------------|--------|---------------------------|----------|---------------------------|
| <b>Life Expectancy in the Wild:</b> | Males: | Unknown but est 20+ years | Females: | Unknown but est 20+ years |
|-------------------------------------|--------|---------------------------|----------|---------------------------|

|                                      |        |                                    |          |                                    |
|--------------------------------------|--------|------------------------------------|----------|------------------------------------|
| <b>Life Expectancy in Captivity:</b> | Males: | 28-30 years based on studbook data | Females: | 28-30 years based on studbook data |
|--------------------------------------|--------|------------------------------------|----------|------------------------------------|

### BREEDING INFORMATION:

|                                |        |          |          |          |
|--------------------------------|--------|----------|----------|----------|
| <b>Age at Sexual Maturity:</b> | Males: | 8 months | Females: | 8 months |
|--------------------------------|--------|----------|----------|----------|

**Courtship Displays:** The male initiates the breeding season by showing off his flight feathers to the female, stretching them to one side. The display is also accompanied by strutting in front of the female, with head pointed down and crest raised. The male often presents food (from the normal diet) to the female. Both of the birds call, thereby strengthening the bond between them as well as defining the territory of the pair. Copulation occurs on the ground.

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### **Nest Site Description:**

Caretakers should provide a nest platform for seriemas that measures approximately 4 ft x 4 ft [1.2 m x 1.2 m] in diameter. The nest platform should be situated near existing bushes or small trees which will provide shade, privacy, and opportunities for chicks to leave the nest at the appropriate time. In the wild, seriemas nest 1–5 m (3–16 ft) off the ground (del Hoyo, 1996), so elevated nest platforms as high as the exhibit allows (while simultaneously allowing sufficient head room for a bird standing in a nest) should be provided for them to meet their desire to roost and nest at this level. A small mesh wire base (1 in x 1 in; 0.02 m x 0.02m) is adequate for the base and will provide a good foundation for the parents to build their nest as well as allow water to drain through.

### **Clutch Size, Egg Description:**

Commonly, 2–3 white, slightly spotted eggs are laid. Incubation is carried out by both sexes. Pairs sometimes eject the first clutch of the season, and some pairs are notorious for repeatedly ejecting eggs. It may often take several years for the pair to stop this behavior or even re-pairing of the birds to correct this problem.

**Incubation Period:** 27 days

**Fledgling Period:** 14-21 days

### **Parental Care:**

The chicks are covered in long light brown feathers and are fed by both parents; they initially weigh about 40–60 g (1.4–2 oz).

### **Chick Development:**

Their development is very fast. At birth, the eyes are open, but the chicks cannot stand. At 1 week, pinfeathers begin to emerge and chicks attempt to stand. As chicks approach 10 days, they are able to stand, and by 14 days may even leave the nest, although most chicks remain in the nest for 3–4 weeks. Even at this age, they can produce a call similar to the adult vocalization, although it is very faint and not as complex as the adult vocalization. Chicks are brooded by both their parents for the first 3 weeks of life. After 3 weeks of age, the juvenile birds roost in trees at night. Because they are unable to fly at this age, they should have perching positioned so that they can reach high roost sites at night. This is best accomplished by placing perches at various heights throughout the exhibit so that the young birds can jump from perch to perch to reach the desired height. At 3 months, the parents will start to wean their chicks by encouraging them to pick up food for themselves. By 3.5 months, chicks are nearly full-grown, although their plumage is still in juvenile form. At 4–5 months of age, chicks can be moved to their own enclosure or sent to other zoos. If chicks are left with their parents, keepers should watch to be sure the parents do not show aggression towards the chicks. Chicks should be removed from their parents several months before the start of the next breeding season (S. Hallager, personal communication).

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## CAPTIVE HABITAT INFORMATION:

**Social Structure in the Wild:** Wild seriemas are most often seen alone or in pairs. Groups of three or more birds are most likely parents and offspring.

**Social Structure in Captivity:** In zoos, a male and female can be housed together year round. More than one pair of seriemas cannot be exhibited in the same enclosure, as they are extremely territorial. Juveniles can stay with the parents until the start of the next breeding season, but should be removed if the parents show signs of re-nesting as the parents are not tolerant of the juveniles' presence.

**Minimum Group Size:** Single birds. [Birds used in conservation and education programs are often maintained as single individuals. Whenever possible, a bird of the opposite sex should also be kept even if just for companionship as seriemas are generally social birds.]

**Maximum Group Size:**  
one male & one female

**Compatible in Mixed Species Exhibits:** Varies

**Comments:** Seriemas can be exhibited with a wide variety of bird and mammal species, but can only be exhibited as pairs or single birds. Seriemas are hunters, and small fledglings of any species will be consumed if the opportunity presents itself. In mixed species exhibits, seriemas should have areas in the exhibit where they feel secure, and where the other species within the exhibit cannot enter. It is critical that seriemas have areas of elevated perching where they can escape to, as well as areas of high perching for nesting. Groups of adult males (two or more birds 6 months or older) cannot be maintained due to the incompatibility of male seriemas with each other.

**Optimal Habitat Size:** The size of seriema pens varies widely. With large pens, dimensions are not critical. Outdoor enclosures that are small in scale should be longer than they are wide. A good recommended size is 7.5 m x 5 m x 2.5 m (24.5 ft x 16 ft x 8 ft) for a pair of birds. However seriemas have lived and bred in both smaller and larger exhibits. Smaller exhibits should provide ample areas for seriemas to hide. The recommended oblong dimensions provide some exercise space, and allow the birds to distance themselves from keepers during enclosure cleaning. These size recommendations are highly

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dependent on the compatibility of conspecifics. Larger dimensions or separate shelters may be required for birds that have a lower degree of social compatibility. All pens, regardless of size, should have areas that permit seriemas to run, and should be high enough that birds can perch at least 1.2–1.5 m (4–5 ft) off the ground. Runs should be long enough that a bird can reach full stride.

**Management Challenges:** There are few management issues with seriemas. They are long lived birds that rarely present with medical issues. Egg ejection is perhaps the biggest issue.

### ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

Seriemas are listed by IUCN as Least Concern with a stable population. BirdLife International 2012. *Cariama cristata*. In: IUCN 2013. IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Version 2013.2. <[www.iucnredlist.org](http://www.iucnredlist.org)>. Downloaded on 11 May 2014.

### REFERENCES:

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### COMPLETED BY:

Name: Sara Hallager

Date: 5/11/2014