

Spotlight on Corey Tutt

Christie Welcome to Squiz Kids Spotlights the podcast where we meet interesting people doing amazing things. Today, we're shining a spotlight on a man who has been a zookeeper and alpaca shearer, a laboratory researcher and a snake catcher. Corey Tutt is a proud Kamilaroi man, the founder of DeadlyScience, the 2020 NSW Young Australian of the Year and a recipient of the Medal of the Order of Australia. He's also an award-winning author whose new book, *Before it was Called Science*, explores more than sixty five thousand years of First Nations knowledge. So how did an animal-mad kid grow up to change the way thousands of Australian children see science? Let's find out. Corey, for Squiz Kids meeting you for the first time, who are you and what do you do?

Corey Oh, mate, I'm a bit like a Rubik's Cube. I've got a lot of passions and jobs. Um, but my main job is I'm the founder and CEO of DeadlyScience. I'm a children's author. I'm also a snake catcher. I'm a dad. I've got a two-year-old son. I, also, I'm a passionate dog agent. My, my dog Daisy is a model, um, who, you know, is part time. But I've got, you know, I've got a number of things that I do, but the main job is, is that I empower and inspire thousands of kids across Australia to pursue STEM education through mentoring and resources. Um, but my favourite job of all those jobs is, I really enjoy catching reptiles and I really enjoy telling people about them, but I also, I love being a dad the most.

Christie Were you always the kid outside catching bugs and possibly scaring the grown ups?

Corey Oh, definitely. And like a lot of my childhood, I spent a lot of time in Bungonia as a kid, um, near Goulburn. I moved around a lot. Lightning Ridge, Nowra. And there was always lots of animals around and I was always catching them up and, and picking them up and, and like, I kind of never really grew out of that. I have this sort of goal as a leader. I really try and relearn something that I've lost, like so. And one of the things I used to be quite good at was handling venomous snakes because I used to do it as a job. So I ended up going back and doing my licensing and, and, and then, yeah, I kind of just get calls sometimes, you know, I'll get no calls for weeks and then other times I'll get fourteen calls a day. Anything from, you know, a blue tongued lizard all the way up to a highly venomous snake or eastern brown snake in the house. And occasionally I go out and grab them when I'm home and I'm not doing DeadlyScience stuff. And that's really, I really enjoy it.

Christie So Corey left school at sixteen and travelled across the country for a chance to work with animals. He worked at a wildlife sanctuary and a zoo, and then answered an ad for an alpaca handler.

Corey I went to Western Australia as a sixteen-year-old kid, which, you know, knowing sixteen year olds. Now I look at them and I'm like, wow, you guys are babies. Um, and, you know, not like it kind of wigs me out and, um, weirds me out a bit that I was a sixteen-year-old kid who went the entire length of the country to get my opportunity to work with animals. There was a lot of challenges along the way. Uh, and then, you know, I spent a few months there and I came back and started working at a little zoo called Nowra Wildlife Park. But then I saw an ad in the paper, an alpaca handler, and and then, um, yeah, the first alpaca I went to, she cracked me in the cheekbone and broke my face. I kept working and I was pretty stubborn at that point.

Christie Corey, before we go any further, what does the word 'deadly' mean in the context of DeadlyScience?

Corey 'Deadly' we got from the Irish because the Irish were also ostracised by the British and were quite sympathetic to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people during colonisation. So words that have a negative connotation, the English language tend to have the opposite in other cultures. And that's where deadly is kind of come into and DeadlyScience. You know, there was never really a name for what deadly science is today. It actually come from a kid that I was working with, um, down in Redfern. We were working and doing this thing that we now call DeadlyScience. And he, this kid told me he's like, this is deadly. This is science and this is our science. So that's where the name came from. And then I drew the logo on a napkin in, um, the Greengate Hotel in Killara and my cousin, Celeste, actually fixed it up and made it digital. And that's, that's how the logo came to be today. And then ended up on a formula one car. I mean, that was pretty cool. The sweetest reward of all is seeing young people pick up, whether it's the books or, or get a smile from deadly science or, or actually have their lives changed and their whole trajectory of life change because they've had that really positive experience. And then the other thing, which is the best part as well is that, you know, you're seeing people that you've employed and given an opportunity to take it with both hands. And now this thing that was your thing has now become their thing. And that's really cool too.

Christie Corey, your new book Before it was Called Science, takes readers thousands of years into the past, but it was partly inspired by Back to the Future. How did that happen?

Corey I was watching a lot of Back to the Future at the time I was traveling. I was spending a lot of time in hotel rooms, and then I started thinking about kind of when I was in the writing process, like, what would it be like before there were influencers? You know, before there was tradies, before there was, you know, what, what was life like before knowledge of today? And so that's kind of how I sort of came up with the concept and the theme for the book.

Christie Long before supermarkets, hardware shops or weather apps, First Nations people were living successfully in every kind of environment across this continent. What knowledge or inventions in the book might surprise kids, do you think?

Corey I think the the main thing is, is that it's really important for everyone, including adults, to realize that we have some of the most varied climates, on this continent, you know, we have (xxuncertain) Country, which is snow, which is cold all year round, pretty much. Ngannawall Country which is cold. We, we have deserts, we have rainforests. Um and I think it's important that people know that Aboriginal people made different types of clothing for that. We lived everywhere. We weren't one central big mob. We lived all over the continent and we had different knowledge systems. Um, we had glue, we had knives, you know, we made glass. And this is just as much my history as an Aboriginal person as it is yours, a non-Indigenous person and reframing that conversation, um, real division starts when, when we aren't proud of the things that as a collective, as humanity. Um, so I, I always like kind of get annoyed that, you know, we talk more about the Aztecs and the Egyptians and, and, you know, even ancient Europe and, and the, the argument that people say, oh, Aboriginal people didn't invent the wheel, but neither did Europeans. It was invented in the Middle East. Um, people appropriate things with culture for necessity, not because not for necessarily greed. That's more of a modern thing.

Christie Corey, in your new book, Before it was Called Science, we learned that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been using scientific knowledge and all sorts of knowledge systems for more than sixty five thousand years. Can a name or a story pass down through generations? Tell today's scientists something that they didn't know about an animal?

Corey We have a Kamilaroi name for a death adder called muntharr. And muntharr means to ambush. So when Europeans first came here, they had a snake called the adder, which is a colubrid, which means its fangs face backwards. And our snakes are elapids, so it means their fangs face frontwards. So they're completely different family genus to the colubrid species, which is found in Europe. But muntharr means

to ambush. But these snakes, when they first come here, the first people to die, it was recorded as in death adder, because if you come across a death adder, it won't move out of your way like a normal snake. It will sit there and it will stay in a under a piece of leaf litter and wiggle its tail. And it, what it does is that, um, it uses caudal luring, which is um, when a snake or a lizard uses its tail as a lure to attract prey. If we used European logic to name this snake again, we would say it's a short, pudgy, slow snake. But that would also be incorrect because it's one of the fastest striking snakes in the world, so it can strike you five times in a second.

Christie That's important knowledge to have.

Corey Yeah.

Christie That's pretty, pretty vital. Um, all right. To finish up, I'm going to give you some quick fire questions. Labcoat or gumboots.

Corey So I really like gumboots because you can get a monster. You can get in the garden. Um, you can get it out in the water. Um, so gumboots for me.

Christie Telescope or microscope or microscope.

Corey Yeah. Um, I can I, I like space, but I, I'm much more interested in what's happening down here.

Christie Reptiles or alpacas.

Corey Oh that's hard, you see, because I love reptiles. But our packers are underrated. But I'll have to go with reptiles on that one.

Christie Um, Bush soap or supermarket soap?

Corey Uh, I think bush soap. It's kind of like a superpower. You can pick off leaves and you can mix it with water and wash it.

Christie Amazing. Uh, your favourite, your favourite Australian animal.

Corey Oh it's hard. I, I love like all Australian wildlife, but I probably have to go. Um, I really like Shingleback. They're my favourite.

Christie Awesome. Um, best bush. Tucker.

Corey That's, uh. I like dugong. Dugong is pretty nice. Sea turtle is pretty nice. Um, but if I had to choose one over kangaroo tail.

Christie And last one, complete this sentence. Science is deadly because.

Corey Science is deadly... because it's innately human.

Christie I love that so much. Congratulations on your brilliant new book. Uh, everyone should definitely read it. And I hear that there's a surprise on the cover for kids that might be reading it at bedtime. Are you allowed to tell us about that?

Corey Yeah, well, it's interesting because, um, I used to work a lot with glowworms and green fluorescent protein as part of my job. So we made the cover glow in the dark.

Christie Corey, we always finished by getting our guests to do the sign off.

Corey Now get out there and have a deadly day.

Christie Over and out.