

## ENQUIRING MINDS

### EQM EP1 SEG 2

LACHIE: If you've ever thought about saving animals then check this out as Beck and Curtis are about to meet somebody who's doing just that.

BECK: Living out here in the bush you would have to love sharing your yard with all the resident animals and I've heard this kid Kurtis is animal crazy. And you must be Kurtis.

KURTIS: Yeah, I am.

BECK: So what are you checking out over there?

KURTIS: Well I was looking for my goanna called Terrence.

BECK: Do you see goannas often around here?

KURTIS: Yeah, mostly Terrence and his two little friends.

BECK: Wow, that's really sweet. What other animals do you have around here?

KURTIS: Well sometimes we see our wallaby called Ernest, we named him after my great granddad. Yeah. Snakes, we see a lot of snakes, mostly red-belly blacks. Spiders, a lot of spiders. Oh, we see possums as well.

BECK: So Kurtis, what is it that you've been learning at school?

KURTIS: The uniqueness about animals and sort of about where they live, like the different environments that they live in.

BECK: What kind of animals?

KURTIS: Amphibians, reptiles, mammals, you know, all those.

BECK: I hear you've got some pretty cool books about reptiles and mammals and all that kind of stuff?

KURTIS: Yeah.

BECK: I'd love if you showed them to me.

KURTIS: Alright then. They're in my room, let's go.

BECK: Wow, I reckon that would be a pretty good place for an animal to live.

KURTIS: Wow, yeah. We've got some spiders there. Pretty freaky.

BECK: What are your favourite animals?

KURTIS: Well, I like these lizards, they're really - I find them very interesting, like the different colours and all the scales and the chameleons how they camouflage and blue tongues.

BECK: Tell us about the blue tongue?

KURTIS: Well, I've seen them around my house quite a bit and I'm pretty sure they like to eat snails and all sorts of different fruits.

BECK: And what about snakes, Kurtis?

KURTIS: I'm a big fan of pythons.

BECK: So aside from reptiles, Kurtis, what other animals do you like?

KURTIS: Well, I really like orang-outangs and I have a book right here about them. I think they're really intelligent and that's what I really love about them.

BECK: I know somebody who's really amazing. His name's Ben, I'd love to introduce you to him. He works with animals and he's also doing some pretty special work with orang-outangs in Borneo, do you want to go and meet him?

KURTIS: Yeah, sure.

BECK: Alright, let's go.

Ben Dessen is a natural sciences student. He loves all creatures great and small.

BEN: You've got to set yourself a goal. That's what I did from a young age. Ever since I was, you know, before I could talk I always knew that I wanted to work with wildlife and I wanted to educate people about them. I got my first snake when I was six and then after that my collection of wildlife and animals at home just grew and grew and grew. You get to school you just take it to that next level. High school again you step it up and now at university, you know, it just progresses and you just build on that knowledge and you just build on that passion.

BECK: Since going to university, Ben has met some inspirational people.

BEN: Her name was Dr Sandra Diamond. She got up, I think it was the first lecture for that semester and she just got up and sort of introduced herself and just started talking and just the passion that she had, you know, I said yep, I'm in

the right place, I'm doing the right degree. You know, if there's people like this that are teaching us, you know, this is just awesome.

SANDRA: You want to know that you're making a difference in someone else's life as well. So having someone whose passions are fired and who go off and do things on their own it's an amazing thrill for a teacher or a professor to feel like they've had some influence.

BEN: Good boy, hey, good boy, yes, you're a good boy.

BECK: Hi, Ben, this is Kurtis.

BEN: How are you, mate?

KURTIS: Good, how are you?

BEN: Good to see you.

BECK: He's also animal crazy.

BEN: Fantastic, I did hear you loved animals. This is my mate Dougie here. I'll introduce you to him. Say hello to Kurtis. He's giving me kisses. Are you going to dance? He's gone a bit shy but I've definitely got plenty of animals to show you, do you want to check them out?

KURTIS: Sure.

BEN: Let's do it.

KURTIS: So who's this little fellow?

BEN: This guy's called a tawny frogmouth. So these guys are a nocturnal bird. A lot of people think they're an owl but they're actually a type of bird. He's a little bit grumpy which is fair enough.

KURTIS: He's biting his own wing.

BEN: Trying to bite me. It's okay, mate. But this guy actually flew into a car. So at night they see the insects in the headlights of the car and they fly in to get them and unfortunately a lot of the time they get hit, they fly into the windscreen.

KURTIS: Poor thing.

BEN: So this guy is in care at the moment. He's actually paralysed from his head down so I'm just feeding him and keeping him warm and I'm giving him physio each day, got to move his legs and that sort of thing to keep the joints moving and hopefully eventually he will be released but he's in a pretty bad way at the moment. We'll try and give him some food and see how he goes. He may not eat because he's a little bit stressed and they're nocturnal so normally they'd be eating at night time.

KURTIS: So they eat mice?

BEN: We'll see how he goes.

KURTIS: You wash your hands after this, right?

BEN: There we go, he's hungry.

KURTIS: Good bird. When did you realised you loved animals?

BEN: Well I think it was always in me from a young age. I think ever since I was a little kid I always just knew that I loved animals. I guess you could almost say it's like in your blood sort of thing and I think that's the same with a lot of people who have a passion they just seem to know, it's just there and I guess that's the same with you, you just know you love animals.

KURTIS: So what was your first pet?

BEN: I think when I was young when I was like 2 or 3 years old I had like mice and rabbits and guinea pigs and just little normal pets like that and a dog and that sort of thing but I think it was when I turned 6 I got my first pet snake and that's when I got my first different pet and that's what sparked, you know, all the animals I have today.

KURTIS: When did you realise you wanted to work with animals?

BEN: I think as I got older I just realised this is exactly what I love doing. I love working with animals and being around animals and that sort of thing and I think if you really love what you're doing it doesn't really feel like a job, does it, because you just want to be there and you love it so much.

KURTIS: So what sort of courses would I have to do to work with animals?

BEN: Basically you've just got to immerse yourself in it. So everything you do at school, outside of school has just got to be heading in that direction. At school, you know, learn and study hard during those subjects, any science you do is good. Try to get involved in extra groups at your school. Some schools have environmental groups, a lot of schools do agriculture as well so definitely getting involved in that sort of stuff will help you. I did biology in high school so biology was crucial to setting the foundations with a lot of the knowledge that I have now at uni as well. So biology, any of the other

sciences as well are definitely worthwhile doing.

KURTIS: So how many animals do you have here at your house?

BEN: Got quite a few. Probably too many to tell you about so I think I'd rather show you.

So here we are. This is it. This is where I spend all my time. This guy down here, he's called a pygmy goanna and then you've got blue-tongue lizards, I'll get this guy out. Would you like a hold of him?

KURTIS: Yeah.

BEN: That's it, just put your hands out flat. He's only a little baby. He's one of the ones I bred this season. You can see that little blue tongue constantly flicking in and out. He's just having a smell, checking everything out. Over here we've got shinglebacks. You can see they get the name because their back looks like the shingles on a roof.

KURTIS: Yeah.

BEN: Do you want a hold?

BEN: Alright.

BECK: He looks like a big pine cone.

BEN: He does a little bit.

KURTIS: Wow, he's heavy.

BEN: Now would you like to do some feeding?

KURTIS: Yes, please.

BEN: Alright, check out these guys, these are called bearded dragons. Alright, now I hope you're not scared of cockroaches. Alright, now what you do, grab that and then just shake it into the tub.

KURTIS: Okay.

BEN: And you watch those beardies, they'll go crazy. That's it, just give it a shake in there. There we go, look at that. They haven't had food today so they will munch on those. There we go, have to get you out here working in my shed, I think. Come around and help me feed all the animals.

KURTIS: Apprenticeship.

BEN: Check out these guys up here.

KURTIS: Wow, oh, stick insects.

BEN: These guys are called stick insects, yeah. He's called a tessellated stick insect. That's actually a female, she's full grown, she won't get any bigger than that.

BECK: So they're all girls in that?

BEN: Yeah, there's a few males in there but the amazing thing about stick insects is you don't need a male for them to breed.

KURTIS: Oh, really?

BEN: You can have one female on its own and she would lay lots and lots of eggs, up to 1,000 eggs in some cases, and they will actually hatch without a male, so they're pretty fascinating creatures. But these are all pythons, so none of these guys are venomous and do you know how they kill their food? How they kill their prey?

KURTIS: They strangle them.

BEN: That's it, they constrict it. Now I've got some food here for them, so would you like to have a go at feeding some snakes?

KURTIS: Okay.

BEN: Grab the tweezers like this and you just hold the rat.

KURTIS: Okay.

BEN: Hold it nice and tight, it's pretty heavy. So we'll just open it up here and then you're just going to shake it, not too hard, just gently like that in front of snake and if you watch his tongue, his tongue is going to start flicking out. You watch, it's going to be so quick. He's smelling it.

KURTIS: I'm afraid.

BEN: Don't be scared, mate.

BECK: It's okay, it's okay.

BEN: He's going that smells good, that smells like food. He's getting closer. Good job, mate, you're doing really well. Watch this it's going to be really quick, any

second. Gently put it near him.

KURTIS: Ooh.

BEN: Whoa, how quick was that? How quick was that?

KURTIS: That was scary.

BEN: If you blink you'll miss it, hey, it's so, so fast.

KURTIS: I saw it.

BEN: What's he doing now? He's constricting it.

KURTIS: Yeah, and he's getting his mouth in it.

BEN: That's it. So he's grabbed it, they use their really sharp teeth to grab it, wrap it up.

KURTIS: Ben's inspirational for me because I sort of see what he's doing is what I want to do so I want to try and follow in his footsteps.

BECK: So Ben, can you tell Kurtis a little bit about what you're going to do this weekend for the orang-outang?

BEN: This weekend I'm heading off to Borneo. I'll be there for about three months. Basically we're working at a conservation project where we're trying to rescue orang-outangs, babies that have lost their parents because of deforestation, maybe baby orang-outangs that have been kept illegally as pets and that sort of thing and we're going to rescue these animals, get them into rehabilitation centres and ideally down the track get them released into secure habitat

where they can live out the rest of their lives there. Because the situation's pretty bad over there, as you probably know, because I know you love orang-outangs and you watch lots of documentaries and stuff about them.

**KURTIS:** I loved meeting Ben because he's awesome. I love all his animals and how he looks after them. I think it's quite amazing and how he rescues all these different sorts of animals. I think it's really cool how he's going to work with the orang-outangs and it's something I'd like to do so he's sort of inspired me to continue with this. Maybe I'll get there some day.

**BECK:** I think Kurtis has really enjoyed his experience today and I can see him following Ben into the field of natural sciences and maybe even saving a few of the world's animals along the way.

**LACHIE:** Next episode, Sascha looks at the world of bridge building and I'm off to the hospital to learn what happens when you break a leg. Thanks for being with us and we'll see you next time.

**VOICE-OVER:** If these stories have inspired you then check out our website for activities and loads of information on all of our experts. Plus don't forget to challenge yourself with our Enquiring Minds game.

END OF TRANSCRIPT