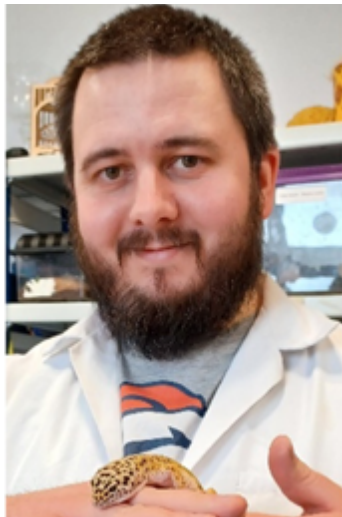


# The Bug Guy

## A technician going above and beyond

**There is a science department in the deepest, darkest West Dunbartonshire where many fear to tread.**

On entering the technician base, you are met with a wall display of tarantula exoskeletons which keeps your average arachnophobic at a safe distance; indeed, there are lines marked on the floor to show how far into the room some brave individuals have ventured on their path to overcoming their fears.



This is the domain of Graeme Anderson, the science technician who unwittingly inherited the care of DAZL – Dumbarton Academy Zoology Learners – a lunchtime club for all-year groups when he joined the service in 2021.

DAZL has been run by the technician team and a science teacher (currently Steph Weir) for ten years. It evolved from an enthusiastic amateur entomologist and a forward-thinking Curriculum leader coming across the ASE article “**you wouldn’t teach football without a ball**”. There was a lot of initial work; a “keeping animals in schools” policy had to be produced with risk assessments for all specimens, care guides and contingency plans should the club need to fold – these really came into play during covid lockdown with all the animals being cared for at home by their assigned keepers.

With the level of devotion and knowledge needed to keep it running, there were concerns when staff movement meant the founding technician moved on. Luckily Graeme (an astrophysicist with no Biology background) came to the team with great enthusiasm, existing amateur knowledge and a commitment to the value of the club to so many areas of the curriculum, and not least, the value to the learners involved in the club. The club’s resurgence on the return from Covid lockdown has been a complete success.



**So what does it involve and who benefits?**

On a daily basis, Graeme will check the stock, making sure everyone has food and water and that the enclosures are clean. Sounds simple enough until you are trudging through 6 inches of snow in January to try to find some bramble for your stick insects! Keeping the enclosures clean and waste-free sets a good example for club members.

He also maintains a breeding programme of hissing cockroaches, various leaf insects and sun beetles to avoid replacement costs, so optimum conditions need to be held for this to be successful and nurseries maintained. You may even see him during the winter holidays, convincing a willing janitor to open the school just to do a check-in or taking batches of eggs home to incubate in a warm space when the school is unoccupied. By now, you may have some idea of the level of work and why such commitment is essential to the club’s success.

**So what do they have? It’s quite a list!**

- 6 assorted tarantulas
- 1 corn snake
- 2 axolotls – wild type and golden
- sun beetles
- 1 leopard gecko
- 1 Asian Forest Scorpion
- Giant African Land Snails
- Madagascan Hissing Cockroaches
- Stick insects and Spiny Leaf insects
- 2 guinea pigs
- An African clawed frog

As well as providing a safe space for learners at lunch time, where they learn about all aspects of the animals and how to care for them, the collection has great educational value, being used across many aspects of the curriculum



Add all of this care and devotion to the existing, ever-increasing daily workload of a science technician, and you will understand why Graeme deserves recognition for this outstanding Club!

If you would like information or advice on starting your own zoology club, including the “keeping animals in school” policy, please contact [frances.walsh@west-dunbarton.gov.uk](mailto:frances.walsh@west-dunbarton.gov.uk)