



Getting a close-up of one of the scorpions



Photos by Sarah Prall, The Arizona Daily Star

Children on their way to the school playground are captivated by entomologist Tony Gustin's scorpion

A buggy lesson

Insect expert's creepy-crawlies, delight, amaze school kids

By Liz Dailey
The Arizona Daily Star

Shrieks of amazement erupted from the De Grazia Elementary School library last week as students observed and held several types of insects with wide eyes.

Entomologist Tony Gustin travels from school to school, educating and entertaining young students about the ways of insects. He has been showing off his creepy crawly friends to students around the country for about five years. He spent last Thursday at De Grazia, 5051 W. Overton Road.

A large group of sixth-graders shuffled into the library one by one, apparently wary of the presentation. But soon, Gustin had their undivided attention. They raised their hands, asked eager questions, laughed at his stories of bug encounters and screamed when he dropped a beetle on the floor.

Gustin quizzed the students on various insect-related questions, while thoroughly grossing them out.

At one point, he pulled out a long

African Millipede and showed it to the class.

"It has four hundred legs," Gustin said as the class groaned.

After explaining how the millipede is harmless and docile, he placed it into his pocket and waited for a reaction. And he got one. The children pointed at his pocket and laughed.

"What? Haven't you ever put a millipede in your pocket before? The best thing about millipedes is how they taste."

His hand went from his pocket to his mouth. He chomped. Students squealed and teachers squirmed in their seats. It was actually a stick.

Gustin also lectured to a large group of kindergartners. They were eager to learn about the bugs and raced to the tables after the lecture to see the creatures.

Ian Burton, 5, leaned over a plastic bowl of Stink Beetles and stared in amazement.

"I'm not scared of bugs," Ian said. "Do they bite? What's so scary about bugs?"



Jennifer Flores, 10, gets to hold one of Gustin's millipedes

Ian giggled as the beetle crawled over his hand.

Other children weren't as enthusiastic about the bugs and looked from a safe distance instead.

Among Gustin's crawly friends were several Emperor Scorpions. He let the kindergartners look at them, with the lid on, but Gustin said in the other lecture with the sixth-graders that the Emperor Scorpion is actually the most harmless of the family.

He took one out of the cage and held it in front of the children. More squirming and squealing ensued.

Katheryn Manker-Seal, 11, held a mil-

lipede and contemplated it. She was unafraid and calm while other children around her stared in astonishment.

"It feels like it's squeezing your hand. Just try it. It's real neat," said Katheryn.

Gustin not only tours different schools, he works with Jack Hanna at the Columbus, Ohio, zoo. He said he came up with the school-touring idea one night with fellow entomologists. They decided it would be a great idea to show children insects for a living to "inspire" them.

For more information about Gustin and his lectures, go to

www.creepycrawlyzoo.com or call (414) 769-0413.