

WHERE CAN SCIENCE TAKE YOU?

EVOLUTION PUZZLE SOLVER

REAL-LIFE SCIENCE CAREERS



NAME: Professor Peter Dearden

ROLE: Professor, Department of Biochemistry,
University of Otago

FROM: Dunedin, where he lives with his family and dog/bear Barkerly.

STUDIES: BSc (Hons) from Victoria University of Wellington. PhD in
nervous system development at Imperial College London.

FOLLOW: His research papers are available on Google Scholar.

WHY SCIENCE?

Growing up, Peter spent his summers tramping with his parents through Nelson Lakes and Mount Aspiring National Parks, discovering birds and critters living in native forests. At home, his mum, a microbiologist, shared her knowledge of tiny living things and plants while his dad, a classics professor, shared stories and ideas from long ago. But at school, Peter was told he was “too clever” to follow his love of biology, instead learning physics and chemistry. Luckily, he met a passionate genetics teacher at university who taught him about the complicated worlds of genes, evolution and microscopic life—which Peter has been exploring ever since!

WHAT'S THE COOLEST PART OF THEIR JOB?

For Peter, science offers the thrill of discovering a secret hidden in plain sight. Looking down a microscope, he might suddenly understand something that nobody else in the world knows yet. Then comes the equally exciting part: working out how to share that discovery with everyone else. But just as Peter solves one mystery, a new mystery normally appears!

FUN FACT!

Peter uses genetics to help protect one of the world's rarest parrots—the kākāpō. He studies their DNA and helps the Kākāpō Recovery team choose which birds should have chicks together to keep a wider mix of genes in the small kākāpō population.

ABOVE: Peter with an extremely rare *Powelliphanta augusta* (Mount Augustus) land snail. He studies the DNA of these unique giant meat-eating snails. Images: University of Otago.



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