

Platypus

Ornithorhynchus anatinus

The platypus is one of Australia's most remarkable mammals. They are classified as a Monotreme, which means they raise their young like most mammals but do not give birth to live young. Instead they lay eggs and feed their young on milk secreted from ducts on the mother's belly. They average a life span of the platypus in the wild is 12 years.

The platypus body is covered in thick, brown, waterproof fur. The males are small but slightly bigger than they females, reaching a length of only 50cm at maturity and weighing around 1.5kg. They have a large, soft and highly electro-sensitive bill which allows them to forage for food along the bottom of the river bed. Their webbed front feet and large flat tail assists them with swimming and burrowing. The male platypus has a sharp spur on each hind foot which releases venom during defence. It is believed that they may use this spur during breeding seasons when males become competitive and territorial.

Platypus are found in eastern Australia and are endemic to this region. They make their home in and near fresh water creeks and rivers building a simple burrow just above water level; and often amongst matted tree debris and roots. They feed mostly on larval and adult aquatic invertebrates.

Breeding season occurs in August where female lay one to two eggs and incubate the eggs by warming them between her belly and tail for around 10 days.

The main threats to the platypus are pest animal species, river pollution and the destruction of waterways.

The platypus is an extremely shy animal which makes spotting them very difficult. The best time to see a platypus is early in the morning, at dusk or when it is cloudy. Be careful not to confuse a platypus sighting with what could be a Water Rat as they look very similar when swimming.

For more information on tips on how to spot a platypus or to report a platypus sighting contact the Australian Platypus Conservancy at <http://www.platypus.asn.au/>

<http://www.ehp.qld.gov.au/wildlife/animals-az/platypus.html>

Queensland Museum 2007, *Wildlife of Greater Brisbane*, Queensland Museum, Australia.

<http://www.wildlife.org.au/wildlife/speciesprofile/mammals/platypus.html>