

JR FACT FILE



PLATYPUS

Ornithorhynchus anatinus



Figure Photo © Trent Browning

AT A GLANCE

Size:

Males grow to 52 cm and weigh up to 2600 grams. Females grow to 43 cm and weigh up to 1600 grams.

Eats:

Freshwater invertebrates, aquatic and terrestrial insects and their larvae, and fish eggs.

Lifespan:

About 5 years for males, slightly longer for females.

Habitat:

Creeks, rivers, lakes and dams in eastern Australia.

Threats:

Pollution in waterways, cats, dogs and foxes.



Natural Predators:

Birds of prey, goannas, pythons and water rats.

What is the Platypus?

Most people think the platypus is a very unusual looking animal. It has a duck-like bill which is flexible and very sensitive, a body covered in brown fur, webbed feet and a flat tail. Male platypus have pointed spurs about 1.5 centimeters long behind the heel of each rear leg. They can use these spurs as a defense mechanism to inject venom into predators or when competing against other male platypus for a mate.

Platypus are semi-aquatic animals spending half a day in search of food in the water and the rest of time resting in their burrows in the side of river banks. Platypus prefer to hunt at night, although in cooler climates they can often be seen swimming in waterways during the day. They swim with their eyes and ears closed and use their bill which has in built electro receptors to detect prey.

The platypus is only one of two egg-laying mammals (monotremes) in the world. The other being the echidna.

Where do platypus live?

Platypus are only found in eastern Australia, living in burrows in the sides of river banks. They usually have a number of different burrows which they rotate through regularly. They use tunnels of one to four meters long to lead up to their burrows. Platypus are solitary animals except for nesting when a mother lives with her pugs (baby platypus).

Great parks to see platypus in Victoria:

Platypus are hard to spot in the wild and rarely do people see more than a flick of the tail or ripples in the surface of the water. However, they can be seen in many parks throughout Victoria including Dandenong Ranges National Park, Great Otway National Park and Yarra Ranges National Park.