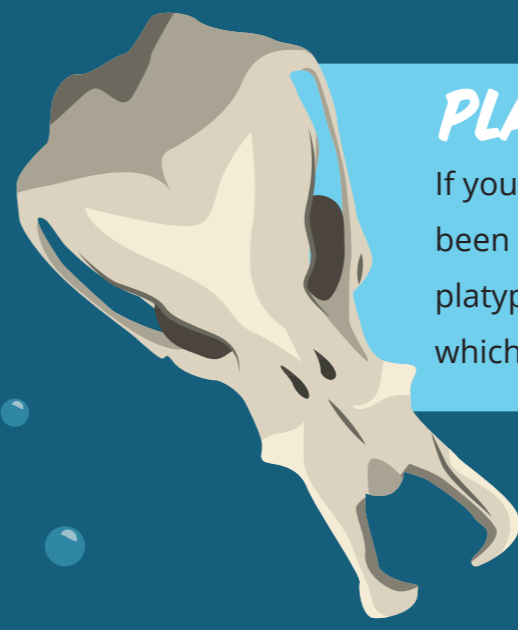


Citizen Science

# ECOLOGY OF THE PLATYPUS



## PLATYPUS SKULL

If you have ever seen a platypus skeleton you might have been shocked by the pincer-like structure on the platypus's bill; these bony prongs support the leathery bill which is full of electroreceptors.

## DESCRIPTION OF THE PLATYPUS

The platypus is a unique Australian animal known as a **MONOTREME**. They are only one of five monotremes currently living; the other four being species of echidna. Monotremes are similar to mammals, however they do not have teats for young to suckle from and they lay eggs!



A **MALE** platypus will grow to roughly **50CM LONG**, while a **FEMALE** will grow to **40CM LONG**.



A Platypus is a small creature, weighing **3.5KG FOR MALES AND 2KG FOR FEMALES**.

## ELECTRORECEPTORS

The most identifiable feature of a platypus is their bill. Much like the rubber of a shoe sole, their bills are flexible, smooth, and have a texture similar to soft leather.

Platypodes use their bills as a 'sixth sense' to detect tiny electrical signals from their prey within the water similar to the ampullae of Lorenzini that a shark utilises. A platypus will use their 'sixth sense' to maneuver within the water as their eyes, nostrils, and ears are covered with folds of skin.

**THICK, WATERPROOF FUR**

**BROAD, FLAT TAIL**

**WEBBED FRONT FEET**

**BILL**

**ELECTRORECEPTORS**

**ACTUAL SIZE**

## PLATYPUS EGGS

Platypus eggs are about 1.7 cm in diameter and they are rounder than most bird eggs. After a female platypus lays her eggs, she will curl around them, incubating them for seven to ten days.

**VENOM GLAND**

## VENOM GLAND

Males can easily be distinguished from females. Male platypodes have venomous spurs on their hind legs. These spurs are connected to venom glands above the thighs. The spurs are used for defence only as the platypus is a shy creature. The venom is not considered to be lethal to humans, however, it has been described as extremely painful. It has the ability to kill smaller creatures.

**SPURS ON MALES' BACK FEET**

## CONSERVATION STATUS

Within South Australia the species is near extinct, with only a handful of populations remaining. Determining the conservation status of the platypus is challenging due to data deficiency, so their current population is therefore a rough estimate.



Figure 1: Rough representation of platypus distribution, according to Atlas of Living Australia

LC

Least concern

NT

Near threatened

VU

Vulnerable

EN

Endangered

CR

Critically endangered

EW

Extinct in the wild

EX

Extinct

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