

The Living Valley



Humans and platypuses living together

Many people may not be aware if a platypus lives near their home. These shy and secretive creatures inhabit many of the healthier freshwater streams in eastern Australia. Although they mainly come out at night to feed, at times you can spot their characteristic 'ripple signature' pulsing on the surface of creeks during the day and in clear view.

The word 'platypus' means broad footed and their scientific name *Ornithorhynchus anatinus* reminds us of the duck like bill and aquatic, egg laying behaviour of these biological oddities. Together with echidnas they make up a group known as Monotremes, the only mammals on earth that lay eggs. Monotremes are unique to Australia and New Guinea and Platypus are only found in Australia.

Though considered quite common, populations have declined in all the major cities and some rural areas. The regular sightings of the 50s are now sadly becoming more rare as alterations turn our local creeks into drains and storm water channels. Other major threats to Platypus come from our discarded fishing lines, fish traps, foxes, unmeshed water pump inlets and toxic run-off.

It's such a thrill to spot these truly iconic wonders. Your best chance to see them is at dawn or dusk. They create burrow entrances that are hidden in creek banks below water level so that they can come and go without being seen. If you want to look for platypuses keep quiet, still, and stay low.

Platypus depend on clean water and vegetated stream banks for sufficient food and stable burrows. These places also support a diversity of other native plants and animals, aquatic and otherwise. If you want to see platypus, look for clean running water courses where people have cared for the streamside vegetation. Happy platypus hunting!

Submitted by platypus researcher, Glenn Normand - edited by the EarthLearning team for their educational compendium. If you have contributions that you would like to share in this column through EarthLearning, a local, not for profit environmental education group, please call 0266791439 or email dom@bewilderness.org