

Platypus on the Gold Coast



Where do platypus live?

Platypus - *Ornithorhynchus anatinus* - are found throughout the Gold Coast in permanent freshwater rivers, creeks and pools, both in coastal lowlands and areas such as Mt Tamborine and the Lamington Plateau. This egg-laying mammal (monotreme) is also known to inhabit artificial water bodies such as farm dams, particularly those close to natural watercourses. Although the platypus is officially classified as 'common but vulnerable' in Australia, it now is considered uncommon in Gold Coast City.

Platypus behaviour

Although several platypus may inhabit the same stretch of water, they are primarily solitary in behaviour. They feed on freshwater invertebrates such as insects, worms and yabbies that live amongst pebbles, logs, sand and mud. For the platypus to stay warm in the water, its fur must remain clean and waterproof and cannot be covered by oils or other pollutants. When hunting underwater, the platypus closes its eyes and ears and relies on an electroreceptor system located in its bill. This helps it to detect the small flickers of electricity produced by aquatic creatures on which it feeds.

What makes a good platypus habitat?

The elements that make a good platypus habitat include:

- a thick cover of healthy, native vegetation on the banks including trees, shrubs, reeds and sedges
- overhanging vegetation that assists in concealing burrow entrances
- varied substrate (bedrock layers) with pools, crevices and grooves
- long, straight stretches of water containing logs and tree roots that extend into the water

Platypus burrows

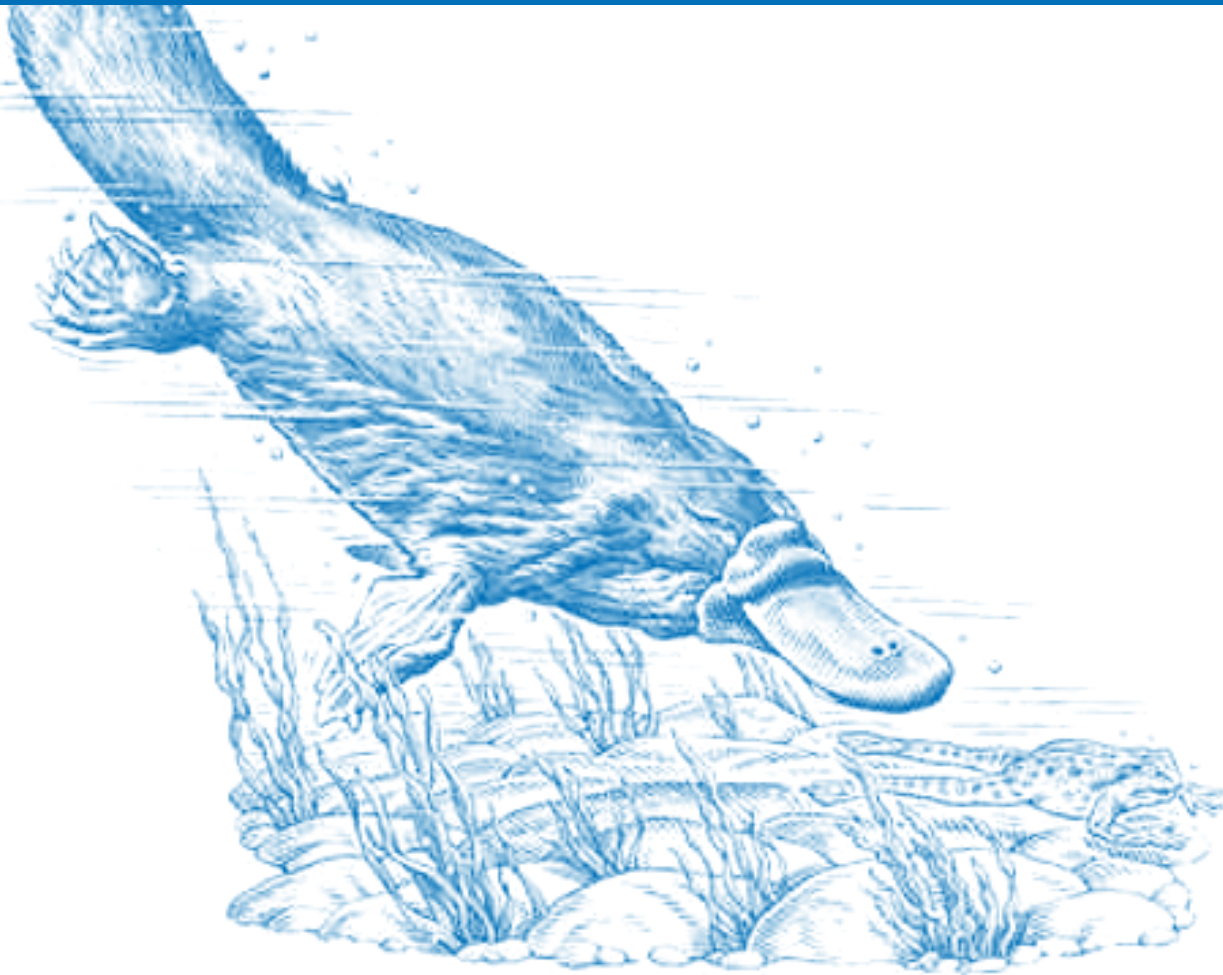
Platypus live in burrows that they dig along the banks of freshwater rivers, creeks and pools. The burrows:

- are often built along moderately undercut banks where vegetation overhangs the water
- may be quite complex, have many side branches and can be up to 30 metres long
- have nesting chambers that are used to lay eggs

Protecting platypus habitat

We all have a role to play in protecting the habitat of this shy, elusive monotreme. You can help by:

- disposing of litter responsibly – platypus can become entangled in items such as fishing lines and plastic seals from food jars
- covering water pump intake points with mesh or a grill – the platypus can be sucked into them
- revegetating eroded creek banks with native plants
- locking up domestic pets at night
- reducing fertiliser and herbicide run-off – an increase in nutrients can cause algal blooms that result in oxygen depletion
- minimising the use of barbed wire fencing across waterways
- managing stock access to reduce the erosion of creek banks and the amount of animal waste that enters the waterway



Restoring platypus habitat

A healthy creek system, including long sections of good creekside (riparian) habitat, is essential for platypus survival. This habitat supplies food and also helps to protect the platypus from predators by providing concealment for burrows. Dead leaves, woody stems and branches play host to a variety of aquatic insects on which platypus feed. Ways you can help restore and improve platypus habitat include:

- water edge planting of grasses, reeds, edges, or shrubs that have flexible branches and do not impede water flow
- planting native trees and shrubs further up the creek bank
- allowing a good layer of ground leaf litter to develop
- making sure logs and fallen branches are not removed

Fascinating facts

- During breeding, each time the female enters and exits the burrow, she blocks the entrance with vegetation she collects with her tail.
- The platypus is one of only two egg-laying mammals. The other is the echidna.
- The platypus has cheek pouches in which food items are stored while it forages underwater.

- Male platypus are larger than the females.
- According to Aboriginal legend, the first platypus was born after a young female duck mated with a lonely and persuasive water rat. The duck's offspring had its mother's bill and webbed feet and its father's four legs and handsome brown fur.

Useful websites:

Australian Platypus Conservancy - platypus.asn.au
Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland - wildlife.org.au
Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service - epa.qld.gov.au
Land and Water Resources - rivers.gov.au
(A Rehabilitation for Australian Streams: Vol 2)

References:

Williams, G.A. and Serena, M. (1999)
Living with Platypus.
(John Herrod and Associates: Melbourne)

Serena, M. (2000) Platypus – Protecting their habitat on private land.
Land for Wildlife Note No.13
Natural Heritage Trust

For further information contact

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Visit us at goldcoastcity.com.au