HOW TO SPOT *a platypus*

Corangamite CMA acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which we work, and pay our respects to their Elders, past, present and future.

Barwon Water

CORANGAMITE CMA

WHY LOOK FOR PLATYPUSES?

Platypuses are amazing. They are unique to Australia and one of our best-known animals. Found only along the eastern mainland of Australia and in Tasmania, human driven impacts like population growth, land clearing, dams, pollution, litter, bushfires and droughts have sadly been destroying their habitat.

Having evolved over 60 million years, in just the last 30 years, their habitat has shrunk by over 20%, or nearly 200,000km^2 (that's three times the size of Tasmania) and now, in Victoria, they are sadly listed as vulnerable to extinction.

Despite being such an iconic Australian animal, we don't really know that much about them, especially their numbers and where they all live. But if we can get a better understanding of their distribution, we can do more to help protect them – and that's where you can help, by letting the scientists know if you see one.

amazing PLATYPUS FACTS

Their scientific name Ornithorhynchus anatinus, translates to 'duck-like bird-snout'.

Their family is older than dinosaurs. The first fossil platypus relatives date back 61-million years!

Platypuses dive with their eyes closed and 'see' using electrical sensors in their bills to find food.

They lay eggs and the young drink their mother's milk by sucking it off their fur.

Male platypuses have venomous spurs on their rear ankles – they are one of the few venomous mammals.

One of the top predators in many Australian waterways, platypuses help maintain ecosystem balance and waterway health.

HOW TO SPOT A PLATYPUS

WHERE TO LOOK

Platypuses need healthy waterways to live in where there is good habitat- like grasses, trees and shrubs - along the bank. They can be found from the coast to the mountains, living in lakes, rivers, creeks, billabongs, dams, and even sometimes seen travelling along irrigation channels.

Spending time in underground burrows they build in river banks, they are normally easiest to see when foraging around water plants and travelling on calm water, but a keen eye can sometimes spot them when water is flowing.

WHEN TO LOOK

Platypuses are generally seen in the mornings and evenings, however sometimes they will be out and about during the middle of the day.

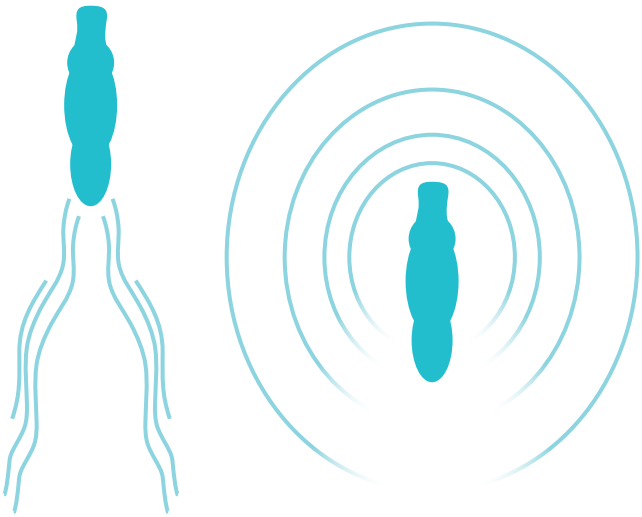
Adult platypuses are also more active during the mating season, and therefore more likely to seen. In Victoria, mating season occurs from late August to about mid- October.

HOW TO LOOK

Platypuses are elusive and can scare easily, so your best chance of seeing them is if you are still (or move slowly) and quiet.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

If finding a platypus in the water, the first things most people will see are either a V-shaped wake or the concentric ripples from diving.

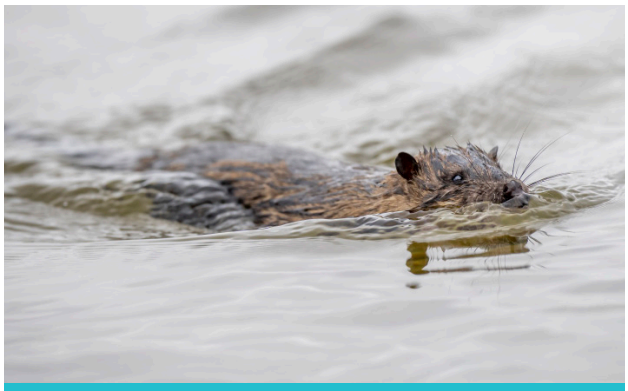


In many places where platypuses are found, Rakali (Hydromys chrysogaster) - sometimes called Australia's 'otter' or water rats - can also be present. Together, these beautiful animals make up Australia's only two amphibious freshwater mammals. But sometimes it's easy to mistake a Rakali for a platypus.

Whilst Rakalis are clearly very different to the platypus on land, when in the water, and especially seen from a distance or in low light, it can sometimes be difficult to tell the difference.

PLATYPUS OR RAKALI?

Here are a few tips to help you tell the difference between platypuses and rakalis.



Rakali (*Hydromys chrysogaster*)

	PLATYPUS	RAKALI
Tail	Flat, paddle-like, uniform colour	Long and narrow with white tip
Ears	Not visible	Visible
Swimming position	Three humps above water: head, body and tail	Head high, above water. Body and tail flat in water
Scratching behaviour	Can spend extended time doing this on the water surface	Normally on land, occasionally a quick scratch on the surface

SHARE YOUR PLATYPUS SIGHTING

If you are lucky enough to spot a platypus in the wild, you can contribute to ongoing research and conservation by recording your sightings.

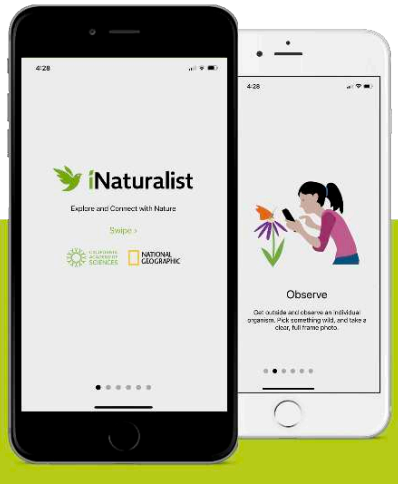
Help protect this iconic Australian species by reporting your observations - every sighting can help! Here are citizen science websites and apps you can use to log your observations depending on whether you have captured a photograph.

Did you take a photo?

YES

Add a photo and location on iNaturalist. The entry will be reviewed and added to the Atlas of Living Australia.

www.inaturalist.org



YES/ NO

Log a description and a photo (if you have one) on the platypusSPOT website.

platypusspot.org

If you are a regular visitor to where platypuses are thought to live, you may want to consider registering with the Australian Platypus Monitoring Network, a project also set up to help track population trends. To find our more, visit **www.platypusnetwork.org.au/home**.

Visit the Corangamite CMA's Citizen Science website to learn more about how you can be more involved in waterway health through the Waterwatch and EstuaryWatch programs.
www.ccma.vic.gov.au

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Photos: Doug Gimesy