ANIMAL LEARNING CENTER · NOT CURRENTLY AT THE ZOO

PLATYPUS

Ornithorhynchus anatinus · also called the duck-billed platypus

Teacher & Student Fact Sheet · © **2026 Plumpton Park Zoological Gardens Inc.**
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Fast facts

ANIMAL GROUP	Mammal — monotreme (egg-laying)
NATIVE REGION	Eastern Australia, Tasmania, King Island
HABITAT	Freshwater streams, lakes and pools
DIET	Carnivore — insect larvae, shrimp, crayfish
SIZE	Males 16–25 in, bill to tail
WEIGHT	Males 1.8–6.6 lb; females 1.3–3.7 lb
LIFESPAN	Up to about 21 years in the wild
STATUS	Near Threatened (IUCN)



A platypus in a creek. Photo: David Clode on Unsplash.

Did you know?

- The platypus is a mammal that lays eggs.
- Platypus mothers have no nipples; milk seeps out through patches of skin.
- Its bill has about 40,000 electroreceptors that sense prey.
- A platypus stores its catch in cheek pouches and chews it at the surface.
- Platypus fur glows green or blue-green under ultraviolet light.

Words to know

Monotreme: a mammal that lays eggs, like the platypus.
Electroreceptor: a sense organ that detects tiny electric fields.
Venom: a harmful substance an animal injects. Male platypuses have venomous spurs.
Burrow: a tunnel or hole an animal digs to live in.

Where it lives in the wild



Lives in the wild ★ Plumpton Park Zoo, Rising Sun, MD

Think about it

1. How does a platypus find food underwater with its eyes closed?
2. What makes the platypus different from most other mammals?
3. How does a platypus's fur keep it warm and dry in cold water?
4. Which platypuses are venomous, and when do they make the most venom?
5. Name two threats to platypuses today.

Draw it

In the box below, draw a platypus diving in a stream. Show its bill, webbed feet and the burrow in the stream bank. Label each part.

STANDARDS · GRADE 4 **WRITTEN FOR GRADES 3–5**

Maryland and Delaware (NGSS): **4-LS1-1 · 4-LS1-2**
Pennsylvania (STEELS): **3.1.4.A · 3.1.4.B**

Draw here

Learn more: plumptonparkzoo.org/mammals/platypus/ · **Sources:** Australian Museum; UNSW Sydney; Zoos Victoria; Victorian Government; Queensland Government; Australian Platypus Conservancy; Manger & Pettigrew (1996); Fish et al. (2002); Anich et al. (2020).
Supports Maryland and Delaware (NGSS) and Pennsylvania (STEELS) standards: 4-LS1-1 (3.1.4.A) · 4-LS1-2 (3.1.4.B)
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PLATYPUS

Before and after your research

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Before you research · 5 minutes

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Predict: where in the wild does the platypus live?
Circle one (or more if it lives on more than one):

Africa | Asia | Australia | Europe | North America | South America

2. Predict: what does it eat?
☐ plants ☐ other animals ☐ both

3. Word hunt: find these words on page 1. Put a check by each one you already know.
☐ Monotreme ☐ Electroreceptor ☐ Venom ☐ Burrow

Pick one word and write what it means in your own words:

4. My question: one thing I want to find out about the platypus.

While you research

Read the animal page:
plumptonparkzoo.org/mammals/platypus/

Write two facts you did not know before.

Draw or describe one body part that helps it survive, and say how it helps.

Draw here

After your research · talk it over

1. Check your prediction. Native region: Eastern Australia, Tasmania, King Island. Was your guess right?
☐ yes ☐ no ☐ partly

2. Diet check. The fact sheet says: Carnivore — insect larvae, shrimp, crayfish. What did you learn about how it finds or eats food?

3. Discuss with a partner, then write your best answer.

- What makes the platypus different from most other mammals?
- How does a platypus's fur keep it warm and dry in cold water?

4. Exit ticket.

One thing I learned: _____

One thing I still wonder: _____

ADJUST IT
Grades K–2: talk and draw instead of writing; read the questions aloud. **Grades 6–8:** add evidence from the fact sheet and the animal page to every answer.