

Gumnut Gazette

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Enter the Life of an Echidna

Introducing the Echidna

The echidna, Australia's living fossil! They have been around for a very, very long time...

These little spiky creatures are so special because they are one of two species of monotreme left in the whole world!

What's a monotreme? Good question. It is a mammal, with a pouch, that ALSO lays eggs!

Echidna Photos, all credit to Cleland Wildlife Park Staff Members

Acknowledgement to country

The Department for Environment and Water acknowledges Aboriginal people as the First Peoples and Nations of the lands and waters we live and work upon and we pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging. We acknowledge and respect the deep

We have the short-beaked echidna here in Australia, easy to recognise by the sharp spines, long noses and short legs. You may see them shuffling around in the warmer weather.

From the egg, to puggle, to fully grown echidna- we have all the fun facts!

So, make like an echidna and shuffle into this new edition of the Gumnut Gazette...

spiritual connection and the relationship that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have to Country.

The Department works in partnership with the First Peoples of South Australia and supports their Nations to take a leading role in caring for their Country.

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FUN FACT

The other monotreme is the platypus!



Fun and games

Elusive Echidnas

Find-a-word

E	D	L	D	T	O	N	G	U	E	E	P	L	E
S	D	I	G	G	I	N	G	S	S	I	R	A	T
P	U	I	M	O	N	O	T	R	E	M	E	M	O
I	E	L	G	G	U	P	A	A	G	W	E	M	R
K	T	E	R	M	I	T	E	G	G	I	I	A	P
E	O	N	A	G	I	L	L	I	M	L	T	M	O
M	S	G	L	E	B	B	I	I	E	D	E	S	R
C	L	A	W	S	R	E	T	H	E	L	C	H	E
T	S	A	L	O	L	K	H	E	H	I	H	U	M
N	E	E	W	L	R	A	L	C	O	N	I	F	R
A	N	N	M	E	I	O	U	I	L	G	D	F	E
U	I	N	U	R	I	O	G	I	M	N	N	L	L
E	P	L	I	W	P	M	E	W	W	L	A	E	L
W	S	T	S	H	O	R	T	B	E	A	K	E	D

ECHIDNA
MONOTREME
EGG
POUCH
MAMMAL
SHORT-BEAKED
TONGUE
SPINES

DIGGING
HAIR
MILK
SPIKE
MILLIGAN
BROWNIE
WILDLING
ETHEL

PUGGLE
TORPOR
CLAWS
TERMITE
ANT
SHUFFLE

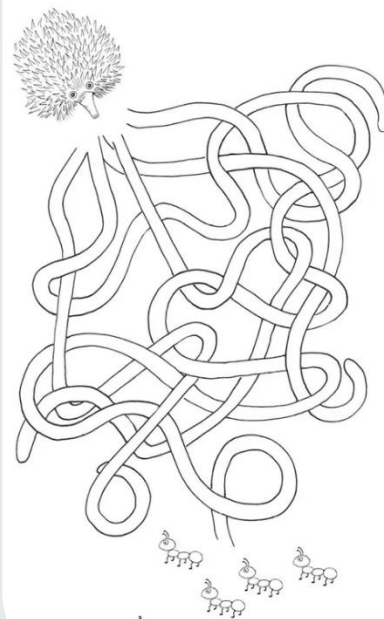
JUMBLE WORD!

U P L G E G

A H D I C E N

MAZE!

Which long echidna tongue leads to the yummy ant dinner?

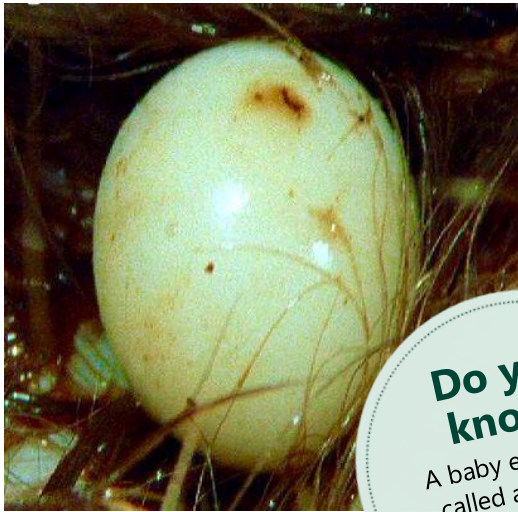


QUIZ TIME!

How many echidnas do we have at Cleland?

- a) 1
- b) 5
- c) 12

Echidna maze credit to: KI&CO Australia



Echidna egg, credit to CWP Staff

Do you know?

A baby echidna is called a Puggle!
(Pictured below)



Echidna Puggles, credit to Ben Nottidge, Alamy Stock Photo

Pouches vs. Eggs

Or why not just have both? Echidnas do!

Echidnas are pretty special. They are one of the two last remaining monotremes in the world! This means, although they have hair, are warm-blooded and have a pouch, they ALSO lay eggs!

After mating, a female echidna will lay one soft, leathery egg into her pouch. Then, 10 days later, the egg will hatch into a baby echidna about the size of a jellybean. This baby is called a puggle and is born with no fur. Lucky for mum, there are no spikes!

The puggle will spend around 7 weeks in the pouch, drinking milk from mum echidna. But fun fact: echidnas don't have teats. So how do babies get the milk? Well, the female echidna develops milk patches inside her pouch and the puggle sucks milk from special hair follicles.

At around 12 months old, the puggle has grown into an adult echidna and will leave the burrow to explore and live their own life.

Female echidnas only develop a pouch when they are pregnant!

Long or Short?

There are two types of echidnas, short-beaked or long-beaked. We have short-beaked echidnas here in Australia, and you can also find them in Papua New Guinea. Long-beaked echidnas are only found in Papua New Guinea though.

The obvious main difference is the size of their nose (or their 'beak'). Short-beaked echidnas are covered in dark fur underneath their spines and mostly eat termites and ants. They can grow to around 40cm and weigh up to 7kgs. Long-beaked echidnas are bigger, growing up to 77.5cm and weighing as much as 16.5kgs. They have less fur, more visible spines and they mostly eat worms and insect larvae.



Short-beaked Echidna, credit to Deb Schutz, Cleland Volunteer

Short

Tachyglossus aculeatus

Can you spot the differences?

Long

Zaglossus bruijnii



Long-beaked Echidna, credit to Muse Opiang, via mongabay.com

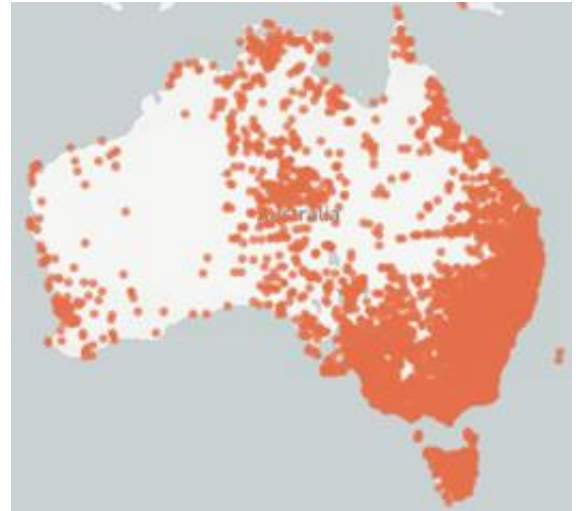
Everything Echidna (part one)

Habitat:

Echidnas are members of the oldest family of mammals alive today. It is believed that they have been in Australia for about 80 million years. A living fossil!

Echidnas live in forests and woodlands, heath, grasslands and arid environments throughout Australia and can adapt to different climates or environments. Which is probably how they've managed to live for so long!

Echidnas are most active when the temperature is between 16-20 degrees, where it's cool but not too cold! During hot summer days, they will be more active during the night. They will burrow into the soil, hide in logs or even go for a swim to cool down during the day. They may not look it, but echidnas are excellent swimmers!



Map of Echidna locations in Australia, Credit to The Australian Museum.

Do you know?

Echidnas have been known to eat around 2kgs of termites in a single sitting!

Diet:

In the wild, you will find echidnas breaking into ant and termite nests to find their delicious dinner. In captivity, they feast on a mix made up of minced meat, bran, eggs, oil, and added vitamins and minerals, all blended to make a special echidna smoothie.

Fun Fact: echidnas don't have teeth! They use their long sticky tongues to slurp up their food and crush it on the roof of their mouths. Their tongue can reach to about 15cm! This helps when they need to reach into termite or ant mounds. They also use their noses and strong claws to break into these nests.



Echidna foraging in termite mound and Echidna eating food mix, both credit to CWP Staff

Echidna spines, credit to 2011 Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

Everything Echidna (part two)

Breeding:

Breeding season for echidnas is from mid-May to early September. This is when male echidnas will search for a female to mate with. Echidnas will form a mating 'echidna train' where about 10 males will follow a female until she is ready for a mate. Some trains can last between 14-44 days, but males will usually only follow the same female for a week at a time. It's a big competition for the males and comes down to the last man standing!



Echidna train, credit to Stuart King via connectingcountry.org

Do you know?
The spikes on an echidna are made from keratin, which is the same as our fingernails!



Echidna close up, credit to CWP Staff

Appearance:

Echidnas are covered in short, dark fur to keep them warm and are also covered in spines to protect them from predators, like cats, foxes or dingoes. These spines are actually long, tough, hollow hair follicles!

Although they are short, echidna legs are very powerful, and they have strong shovel-like claws which help to dig into soil and break apart termite or ant mounds.

Their noses grow to around 7-8cm long and are very useful. Echidnas do not have good eyesight, so they rely a lot on their noses for sniffing out food, looking for a mate, or even detecting danger. Their noses have special receptors, which means echidnas can feel the vibrations from when ants or termites are moving around underground.



Echidna ball, credit to Billabong Sanctuary, Townsville.

Self-Defense:

Echidnas have been known to survive extreme conditions like bushfires by digging themselves below the surface. The layer of earth above can protect them from the flames and heat.

If they are feeling threatened from a predator, echidnas will roll into a ball and use their spikes to defend themselves too.



Colouring in Page!

Echidna, Morialta Conservation Park, Drawing
Credit to: 2013 Department of Environment,
Water and Natural Resources.



Funky Feet

We already know that echidnas are pretty interesting creatures. Another fun thing about them is their feet!

Why? Echidnas have special feet. Their front feet have 5 toes and face forwards. But their back feet, face toward the back! This helps them to push soil away while burrowing. They have one extra long claw as well that helps to comb out any dirt or bugs in their spines.

Take a look at your hands and feet and see how they are different...



Fore foot and print



Hind foot and print

**This is Ethel,
showing off her
feet!**



Picture of echidnas burying themselves in off-exhibit holding enclosure. By Cleland staff

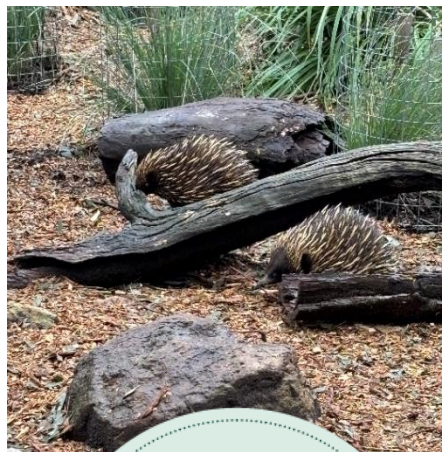
Too Cold...

During the winter months, echidnas go into a type of hibernation, called 'torpor'. Torpor is a state where the body temperature, heart rate, and metabolism are lowered to save energy.

Fun Fact! Echidnas can go into torpor during any season. They use it as a survival method when food sources are low or in extreme weather conditions.

Experience of a Lifetime...

During the Summer months, we offer an echidna experience at Cleland for anyone over 6 years old. Book it in for your next summer holidays!



Do you know?
Echidnas are not territorial so our 5 all live happily together!

Next Time...

When you visit Cleland next time, see if you can find all 5 of our echidnas... They are very good at camouflaging!



Echidnas in our enclosure at Cleland. Credit to CWP staff

Echidnas at Cleland

We have 5 echidnas here at Cleland Wildlife Park. Their names are Spike, Milligan, Brownie, Wildling and Ethel.

Spike is our longest resident here; he's been here for almost 15 years! He loves his food and is very confident. He also loves Ethel and has mated with her before.

Milligan is very curious. He has also followed Ethel in an echidna train but lost to Spike. He spends a lot of time in torpor in the cooler months.

Brownie is our smallest and most independent echidna. She loves to dig and breaks a lot of her spines in the process (but new ones grow, don't worry!). She also loves a good swim around the enclosure pond, especially when our staff are trying to clean it!

Wildling is our most active. She's been called "our wildest echidna". She is the largest at Cleland and spends a lot of time asleep after her adventures shuffling around.

Ethel is our most recent resident echidna; she came to us from Lobethal after the fires in 2020. She had been injured, her feet were burnt, and her spines melted, but now she is all better after lots of care! She has scars on her feet that stop her from digging in the soil though, so we made artificial burrows for her to hibernate in. She is by far our messiest eater, but she is also very slow. She isn't afraid to push the others out of her way when she's hungry though!