

Fun facts

Echidnas are good swimmers. When they swim, they raise their beak out of the water so they can breathe.

Echidnas are **not** related to porcupines or hedgehogs.

An echidna can live a long time. The oldest one kept in a zoo lived to about 50 years of age in Philadelphia U.S.A.

Long beaked echidnas can be very curious. Many of them aren't afraid of people. But the short-beaked echidnas are shyer.

Echidnas will sometimes make soft snorting sounds.

The echidna and the duck-billed platypus (also from Australia) are the only mammals that lay eggs.

Echidnas have been around since the time of the dinosaurs. They are named after a monster in Greek mythology.

The Olympic Games were held in Australia in 2000. One of the mascots of the Games was Millie the echidna.

THE AMAZING ECHIDNA



PUGGLES IN POUCHES

By Sharon Greenaway



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if you are driving in an area where they live, be careful so that you won't run over an echidna.

The long-beaked echidnas in New Guinea are listed as vulnerable. That means they are in danger of becoming extinct.

The people hunt them with dogs and kill them for food. Also, people wipe out their forest habitat so they have fewer and fewer places to live.

There used to be four different kinds of echidnas. Now only two are left.





Who are its enemies?

Dogs, cats, foxes, and wild pigs like to eat echidnas. Native animals such as the goanna and dingo (wild dog) also like to eat them.

If an echidna is frightened, it will try to hide. If it cannot do that, it will dig a hole in the ground and curl up in a ball.

If an animal grabs at it, the echidna raises its spines. In many cases this scares the attacking animal away.

Echidnas have short legs so they move slowly. They are often knocked over by cars on the road. So

What is an echidna?

Echidnas are animals that have spiny hairs all over their body. This makes them look like a hedgehog or a porcupine.

Echidnas are also covered in fur. Depending on where they live, some are furrer than others. They can vary in color from very light brown to red-brown and right through to black.

Did you know that the spines are really hairs?
They are just very large and strong hairs.

The echidna has a long snout that works as both a mouth and a nose. It uses its long snout to find food and smell for danger. It has a long pink sticky tongue that it uses to gather its food.

The echidna has very short legs. That makes it waddle when it walks. It can't run very fast, but it is a powerful digger.



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A female echidna does not always have a pouch. She uses her tummy muscles to form one when it is time to give birth.

Imagine what it would be like to make a pouch for a puggle.

Sit on the floor, with your legs out in front. Now pull in your tummy muscles. Can you see a hollow in your tummy? Let it out.

This must be a bit like what a female echidna does when she has her egg. But the female echidna has to keep this pouch shape for almost six months!

As soon as the puggle is born, it wriggles over to a patch in the pouch where there is milk. Echidna mothers do not have nipples. Instead, they have a patch of skin. The baby sucks milk out through the skin.

An echidna does not have spines when it is born. These start to grow when the puggle is around 40 days old. At around 50 days of age, the mother digs a burrow for the puggle to live in. She leaves it in the burrow while she goes looking for food.

The puggle stays in the burrow until its spines are fully grown and it is weaned off its mother's milk. This happens at about seven months old. The young echidna is then grown up enough to live on its own.



How are babies born and raised?

An echidna is a monotreme. A monotreme is a mammal that lays eggs. Most mammal babies are born alive. But monotreme mothers hatch their baby from an egg.

Monotremes have been around since the time of the dinosaurs. Hundreds of years ago there used to be many monotremes on the Earth. Now the echidna and the platypus are the only ones left.

When the mother is ready, she curls her tail under her and sits down. Then she lays one egg into her pouch.

After ten days, the tiny young echidna hatches out of the egg. This baby is called a puggle.

Echidnas have four feet with five toes on each foot. Each foot has a claw on the end of it.

The front feet are used for digging burrows and digging up worms, ants and termites. The back two legs are not as strong, but the claws are longer than the front ones.

These back feet each have one longer claw that is used as a grooming claw. They use this claw to dig dirt and sticks out of their fur.



What do echidnas eat?

The echidna is sometimes called the spiny anteater. The funny thing is that echidnas eat lots of things other than ants. They like worms, termites, bugs and all kinds of insects.

The long nose of the echidna is really its mouth. It has a very small opening in the front. It will slide its tongue out and slurp up worms and insects.



Do echidnas live alone or in groups?

Echidnas often live by themselves. This changes when they want to mate between June and September.

When they want to mate, male echidnas seek out a female and follow her around. Sometimes there can be a few males following one female in a row. This is called an echidna train.

evening. If it gets too hot, they might even become nocturnal. A nocturnal animal sleeps all day and feeds at night.

Echidnas are shy creatures and so it is not easy to see one. You might be lucky and see one hiding in a log.

Where I live in Central Victoria, Australia, I have seen only two or three echidnas walking in the bush. I have lived here for 17 years!

Last year I saw a large echidna on the side of the road in front of my home. I ran to get my camera to take a photo. It was only when I got closer to it that I realized it was dead. A car had run over it!



© Sharon Greenaway

The echidna does not have outer ears. Instead it has two ear slits that are protected by tiny spines. It also doesn't have teeth to chew. Instead it has spikes on the top of its tongue.

The echidna will dig around in the dirt or open a termite nest with its strong claws. Then it will stick its snout into the dirt or hole and feel around. When it finds an animal it will stick out its tongue.

The spikes on the end of the tongue help it to grab its food. It then pulls in the tongue and swallows the worm or insect.



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Where do they live?

There are two kinds of echidnas. They live in Australia and New Guinea.

The long-beaked echidna lives in New Guinea. It grows from about 45 cm to 77 cm (18 inches to 31 inches). It can weigh about 16 kilograms (35 pounds).

Long-beaked echidnas like to live in mountain forests or in high mountain meadows.

The short-beaked echidna lives in Australia and New Guinea. This echidna is smaller and grows to about seven kilograms (15 pounds). It only grows to about half the size of the long-beaked echidna.

Short-beaked echidnas live in all sorts of places. They have been found in the high snow and in deserts.



Except when the female digs a burrow for her young, echidnas do not have a set home. They just look for a good place to hide and rest when they want to. Hollow logs and native plants make good hiding places for them.

Echidnas can travel a long way looking for food. Their range could be as big as two hundred hectares (twelve and a half miles). That is a big area for an animal that moves so slowly.

Echidnas usually sleep at night and look for food in the day. When the weather gets very hot, they will move around more in the morning and the