

SHORT-BEAKED ECHIDNA

Information booklet



© Craig Dingle/Canva NFP





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GET TO KNOW

the Short-beaked Echidna

The short-beaked echidna is a mammal that lays eggs! There are only five species of mammals that lay eggs – the short-beaked echidna, the platypus and three species of long-beaked echidna. Together, these egg-laying marvels are grouped into a special group called monotremes.



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The Tasmanian short-beaked echidna,
Tachyglossus setosus



© Canva NFP

The Kangaroo Island short-beaked echidna,
Tachyglossus multiaculeatus

THERE ARE 5 SUB-SPECIES OF SHORT-BEAKED ECHIDNA

While there is only one species of short-beaked echidna, there are five sub-species. These sub-species can be differentiated by their degree of hairiness (compare the Tasmanian sub-species to the Kangaroo Island sub-species above), spine length and width, and the size of the grooming claws on their hind feet.

To the right: *Tachyglossus aculeatus*, found in Queensland, New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria.



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LIFESTYLE

Echidnas are typically solitary animals and are generally only found together during the breeding season. They are shy animals with a fairly placid nature. If disturbed or approached, an echidna will curl into a ball with its snout and legs tucked beneath. With its sharp spines sticking out, this conceals its head, deterring predators. They burrow themselves into the base of grasses and trees and can wedge themselves under rocks or burrow straight down into soft soil to retreat from predators.



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REPRODUCTION

Short-beaked echidnas breed from late June to early October. A characteristic displayed by some sub-species during this time is the formation of 'trains' – where two to ten males follow a single female; a male echidna may join several separate trains. If mated, females typically lay a single egg (but can lay up to three), which is incubated in the pouch and takes about ten days to hatch.



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THERMOREGULATION

The short-beaked echidna's body temperature is lower than other mammals, sitting at 30–32°C, around 6–8°C lower than us! Further, during periods of inactivity, they can self-regulate their body temperature, dropping it as low as 5°C. This is common in cooler weather and helps them conserve energy.



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ECOSYSTEM ENGINEERS

NATURE'S EXCAVATOR

Short-beaked echidnas dig depressions in the soil while foraging for ants. This behaviour plays a crucial role in Australia's ecosystems by turning over huge amounts of soil, around 200 m³ each year – or eight trailer loads per echidna! This helps improve soil health, promotes plant growth and keeps carbon in the soil rather than the atmosphere. By improving echidna habitat, we can significantly improve soil health and boost climate action efforts.

IDENTIFICATION

Echidna scats are very unique looking as they are:

- Long and cylindrical in shape
- The thickness of a 5 or 10 cent coin
- Dry in texture
- Filled with ant/termite exoskeletons

They may be broken into pieces when you find them, so the best way to identify them is to check for the insect exoskeletons.



© EchidnaCSI

Echidna hind legs point backward, with an extra-long claw on the second toe that can be used to "comb" or scratch out dirt and bugs that get wedged between the echidna's spines.



© Wahroonga Waterways Landcare

THREATS

Echidnas are vulnerable to habitat loss from land clearing and development. Echidnas are a frequent casualty on roads. Please take care when driving and keep an eye out for echidnas and other wildlife.



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Dingoes, goannas, snakes and feral cats may eat young echidnas. Adult echidnas fall victim to dingoes, dogs and eagles.



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CONSERVATION STATUS

The Kangaroo Island sub-species is currently endangered, while the remaining four sub-species are considered common and can be found anywhere from the outback to the backyard. However, we lack data to justify the extent of their numbers and distribution, especially in South East Queensland.



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EchidnaWatch

REPORT AN ECHIDNA SIGHTING

YOU CAN HELP BY REPORTING SIGHTINGS



To help protect the short-beaked echidna, we need a better idea of where populations exist and in what numbers.

Wildlife Queensland's EchidnaWatch program aims to collate information on the distribution of echidnas in Queensland. We can share this information with Wildnet and other organisations to help plan for better outcomes for echidnas.

REPORT YOUR SIGHTING HERE: WWW.WILDLIFE.ORG.AU

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