

Echidna (*Tachyglossus aculeatus*)

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Fact Sheet

Overview

The Short-beaked Echidna is one of only three surviving monotremes — mammals that lay eggs. Found right across Australia, including Tasmania, echidnas thrive in diverse habitats from bushland to backyards. Solitary and slow-moving, they are fascinating survivors of an ancient mammalian lineage and play a vital role in keeping our soils and ecosystems healthy.

Echidnas are strong diggers and can live for more than 50 years in the wild. They have a remarkable sense of direction and are known to return to the same feeding and nesting areas year after year — which is why they should never be translocated from their home range.

Habitat & Ecology

- Echidnas are found in all Tasmanian regions — from coastal scrub to alpine slopes.
 - They are solitary but not territorial; home ranges often overlap and can exceed 250 hectares.
 - Their digging aerates soil, increases water absorption, and helps spread seeds and beneficial fungi.
 - They feed mainly on ants, termites, beetles, worms and insect larvae, using their sticky tongue to capture prey.
 - Echidnas have an exceptionally low body temperature (31–33°C) and can enter torpor — a state of reduced body temperature and metabolism — to conserve energy during cold or food-scarce periods.
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Breeding & Young

- Breeding season: Late June to early September.
- Females usually breed from 5–7 years of age, sometimes later, and may only reproduce every few years.
- Males can breed annually, and during the season may form “echidna trains” — a line of up to eleven males following a single female for days or weeks.
- After mating, the female lays one leathery egg into her pouch around 22 days later.

- The egg hatches after about 10 days, and the tiny young — called a puggle — remains in the pouch for 45–55 days before being placed in a nursery burrow.
 - The mother returns every few days to feed her young until it's weaned at around seven months. After that, there is no ongoing parental care.
 - Young echidnas disperse from their natal area by 12–18 months of age.
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Threats

Echidnas face a range of human-related and natural threats across Tasmania:

- **Road strikes** are a major cause of death.
 - **Low electric fencing** can be fatal.
 - **Predation** by cats and dogs affects both adults and young.
 - **Habitat loss** and land clearing reduce feeding and nesting opportunities.
 - **Diseases** like salmonella and toxoplasmosis
 - **Pesticides and soil contaminants** can enter the food chain and affect echidna health.
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If You Find an Echidna

- Do not relocate an echidna unless it's in immediate danger (e.g. on a road).
 - Never lift by the spines. If rescue is necessary, gently scoop the animal up with a towel or blanket from underneath.
 - If a female is found deceased, check carefully for a puggle in the pouch.
 - Contact **Bonorong Rescue (0447 264 625)** for advice or assistance.
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Did You Know?

- Echidnas can dig themselves almost completely into the ground in seconds when threatened.
 - Their tongues flick up to 100 times per minute to catch prey.
 - They can swim and sometimes cross dams or creeks.
 - Each echidna's digging pattern is unique — like a fingerprint!
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References

Pelican Lagoon Research & Wildlife Centre, Rismiller & McKelvey (1988–2024)