

The Funniest Animal on Earth

One of the funniest animals on Earth is the duck-billed platypus. With a body like an otter, a tail like a beaver, and a bill and feet like a duck, they are sure to make you laugh. Unless you're running from the male's venomous spurs!

This strange creature lives in Australia, which is home to many strange creatures that are not found anywhere else. They can be seen swimming in freshwater rivers and streams in the eastern part of the continent. They survive in both the hot climates of the north and the colder climates of the south.

Along with the echidna, the platypus is only one of two animals that are classified as monotremes, which are mammals that lay eggs. Experts think that they are early ancestors of modern mammals. Research has shown that they first evolved over 112 million years ago, during the time of the dinosaurs.

Platypuses have flat heads and bodies that help them glide through the water. Their fur, dark brown on top and tan on their bellies, is thick and water repellent. It also glows in the dark! Platypus nostrils close up to be watertight, and their eyes and ears have folds of skin to protect them.

Relatively small creatures, platypuses grow to be about 15 inches long, or the size of a house cat. Their tails are about 5 inches long. One of their

most interesting features is their snout. Shaped like a duck's bill, it is soft and leathery. It helps them find food with its thousands of receptors that detect electric signals in the water.

Platypuses feed on the bottom of the rivers, lakes, and streams where they live. They scoop up insects, shellfish and worms in their bills. They also scoop up gravel and mud, which helps them chew. They store everything in their cheek pouches until they get to the surface. Then, they mash their food using the gravel, since they do not have teeth.

These funny creatures are shy. They live mostly alone, and spend much of their time eating and sleeping. They breed once a year and the females lay soft, leathery eggs like a reptile. The males fend off their enemies by using their sharp stingers. These stingers located on the heels of their back feet can shoot poison that causes temporary paralysis.

The platypus looks like something a mad scientist might have dreamed up in a lab. But it really exists! It gives us a hint of what life looked like millions of years ago. It also gives us a good laugh.



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NAME: _____ DATE: _____

1. Which of the following is NOT a characteristic of the platypus?
 - a. Duck-like bill
 - b. Otter-like body
 - c. Fish-like fins
 - d. Beaver-like tail

2. What are monotremes?
 - a. Mammals that lived during the time of the dinosaurs
 - b. Mammals that lay eggs
 - c. Mammals that have venomous spurs
 - d. Mammals that live in Australia

3. Why do you think their fur is dark on top and light on the bottom?
 - a. To provide camouflage in the water
 - b. To make them look more like a beaver
 - c. To help them lay eggs
 - d. So they blend in with the yellow sand

4. Why do you think their feet are shaped like a ducks?
 - a. To help them swim
 - b. To help them walk
 - c. To fend off predators
 - d. To look funny

Instructions for teachers:

These questions can be used to assess understanding of the reading passage.

The item in bold is the correct answer for each question.

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