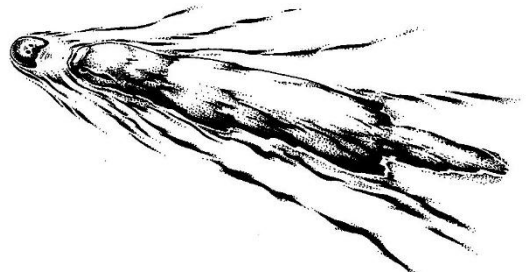


Platypus News & Views



Newsletter of the Australian Platypus Conservancy (Issue 103 – August 2026)

TOP BILLING FOR PLATYPUS NEST-MAKER

Recent issues of *PN&V* have highlighted how citizen scientists continue to document interesting or unusual aspects of platypus behaviour. Following on from Denise Illing's remarkable image in *PN&V* no. 101 of a gravid female carrying nesting material tucked under her tail in the Yarra River in Victoria (<https://platypus.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/E-PNV-101.pdf>), Suzanne Pearson has now documented how nesting material may also sometimes be carried by a platypus using the bill, as shown below.

As far as we're aware, this is the first time that this particular behaviour has been reported either in captivity or the wild – as seen here in Obi Obi Creek at Maleny, Queensland on 6 August 2026.

We feel the most likely explanation is that the material in question is quite thin in relation to its substantial length, so the animal felt it might be difficult to transport securely using its tail but also fairly easy to drag alongside while swimming.

Whatever the reason, it illustrates yet once again that humans almost certainly have a long way to go before the behaviours adopted by this species across its vast array of habitats are adequately described.

Along with illustrating a new facet of platypus biology, this incident provides valuable information about when platypus breed in Queensland's Sunshine Coast. Information concerning when eggs are laid or hatch in the wild remains scanty, reflecting the fact that these events happen in underground burrows.



Photo: Suzanne Pearson

Most of what is known about the timing of incubation or hatching is therefore inferred from related behaviours that can be viewed in the water - courtship, mating, or gathering material used to build nests. As you may recall from *PN&V* no. 101, platypus nesting material is only carried back to a burrow by females in the relatively brief window of time (approximately 16 days) between mating and egg-laying. This means that nesting behaviour provides quite an accurate indication of when eggs will be laid (with the best estimate in the current case being 13 August, give or take 4 days).

Platypus mating activity is expected to peak over the next few weeks across much of the Australian mainland, and continue until as late as December in Tasmania. Anyone lucky enough to record behaviours linked to platypus reproduction is strongly encouraged to record the salient details on the Report a Sighting page of the Conservancy website (<https://platypus.asn.au/report-a-sighting/>), so this information can be recorded for posterity.

NEW INSIGHTS INTO RAKALI BEHAVIOUR

The past six months have generated some amazing photographs documenting various aspects of rakali behaviour. Here are three examples.

Photo: Lissa Ryan

First, Lissa Ryan often captures great rakali images in the course of her work as the volunteer co-ordinator for an important rakali monitoring program around the perimeter of Lake Wendouree, a large urban lake located at Ballarat in central Victoria.

We particularly love this one of a rakali doing its 'faster than a speeding bullet' impersonation of Superman.



The image highlights how nimble and physically capable this species is on land, but also how it feels much more secure in the water – this one is racing across a footpath to reach the nearby lake as Lissa approaches.

Second, Noel (surname not supplied) sent us a number of short videos recorded by a wildlife camera mounted in his chicken shed in northern New South Wales, illustrating the efforts made by rakali to consume eggs at night.

We found these videos to be particularly interesting in light of remarks first published in 1948 by David Fleay (a renowned naturalist and the first person to breed both the platypus and rakali in captivity): *Although it is strange, the chisel-toothed Water Rat finds difficulty in breaking an ordinary hen egg, and such delectable items of food are quite safe even though the creatures are hungry.*

Supporting this view, research conducted by CSIRO biologists found that rakali studied in captivity were able to open chicken eggs when the shells had even a tiny crack, but left undamaged eggs intact for weeks.

On the other hand, several persons have reported to us that rakali will enter henhouses for the express purpose of consuming eggs, sometimes being caught in the act of dining on them.

So, was Dr Fleay mistaken in his comments quoted above? It appears both yes and no.

Noel's images show a rakali trying to bite through an eggshell without success on more than one occasion, apparently because the animal wasn't able to open its mouth wide enough to achieve a good grip.

However, animals (up to two rakali were filmed at a time) also rolled eggs around inside a laying box using their muzzle and sometimes appeared to try to pick up an egg using both front paws before dropping it again. Though it remains unclear how often this sort of activity caused a shell to crack, it is certainly true that in one video a rakali can be seen happily lapping up the contents from part of a recently broken egg (as shown at right).



(cont. on page 3)

NEW INSIGHTS INTO RAKALI BEHAVIOUR (cont. from p. 2)

Last but certainly not least, Georgie Smith has documented how a rakali has developed expertise in hunting galah cockatoos (*Eolophus roseicapilla*) in a lagoon along the Murray River near Mannum in South Australia.

In her own words, this is what Georgie observed:

On our first evening (30 July) we were just watching the galahs settling for the night and coming down to drink. We then saw a ripple heading towards a stump where some galahs were perched. Next, we saw a splash and a frantic galah trying to get out of the water. It appeared that a rakali had caught the galah. It looked like the rakali was drowning the bird.

The following evening the same thing happened between 4.30 and 5.30 pm. The third evening was a repeat of the other two evenings but the rakali was unlucky with its hunt. The fourth evening we were more prepared with our cameras. We like wildlife photography and have good cameras and 600 mm lenses. The lighting was fading rapidly and with the distance the images are not of professional standard. However, they tell a story.



We watched the behaviour more closely and noted the skill the rakali had in stalking and then capturing its prey. It picked a stump with several birds on it, selected the bird it wanted, ducked under the water and attacked from behind whilst the galah was drinking. The whole attack happened in a split second (shown at left). The rakali's evening meal was then dragged into the reeds for eating (shown below).

Elsewhere, a rakali has been observed killing a musk duck (*Biziura lobata*) in the water after grabbing the bird's tail and hanging on until the duck was exhausted; short-tailed shearwaters (*Ardenna tenuirostris*) are known to be taken on land while nesting. Bird remains were found in 8% of rakali stomachs at a study site in New South Wales, though fish and aquatic insects occurred much more frequently.

Photos: Georgie Smith



The ability of a rakali to prey successfully on birds that are similar in size to itself (or even larger) provides an additional point of similarity to otters. For instance, we have witnessed an American river otter (*Lontra canadensis*) kill a full-grown cormorant as it rested on the surface of a bay (again, not long before dusk) by sneaking up behind the bird and remaining submerged until leaping abruptly onto the back of its victim.

Somewhat surprisingly, we have never heard anyone claim that a rakali will attack hens, even in a shed at night. Do any readers know of evidence to the contrary?

ELASTIC HAIR TIES CLAIM ANOTHER PLATYPUS VICTIM

We realise that platypus litter entanglement is old news (most recently, see [PN&V no. 99](#)). Unfortunately, it's news that won't go away - yet another platypus has been found dead in recent weeks with an elastic hair tie cutting into its neck, this time along the upper Ovens River at Bright township in northeastern Victoria.

This popular tourist destination features swimming holes shared by platypus and humans, with multiple platypus mortalities linked in recent years to hair ties dropped in the water. Alpine Shire Council has installed signage to help spread the message that wearing a hair tie when swimming and then leaving it behind is equivalent to depositing a time bomb for wildlife. Meanwhile, it would be wonderful if everyone would make a habit of picking up items of loopy litter - no matter how far from the nearest waterway - and routinely snipping through all plastic or elastic loops before disposing of them responsibly.

ORNITHO GIANT PUPPET

On a happier note, a spectacular new addition to the list of popular depictions of the platypus has recently arrived, courtesy of the Théâtre Faits Divers in Brittany, France.

'Ornitho' (an abbreviated form of 'ornithorhynque', the word for platypus in French) is an imposing inhabited puppet (210 centimetres in height), consisting of a foam-padded structure covered by fabric. For more information about the performance group that created Ornitho, please visit <http://theatrefaitsdivers.fr/>



PUTTING RAKALI ON THE MAP

The latest example of the growing interest in the 'Aussie otter' is an online map that pulls together all rakali records for the greater Melbourne region sent to Atlas of Living Australia in the last 30 years (most of which have been contributed via the Report a Sighting page of the APC website). The map is a project of Dr Kylie Soanes and her team at the University of Melbourne (Melbourne Centre for Cities) and can be viewed at: <https://pursuit.unimelb.edu.au/articles/australias-elusive-rakali-is-quietly-thriving-in-melbournes-waterways?>

The rakali map was launched in August and generated considerable media interest, including a lengthy interview with Kylie on ABC TV News Breakfast. The subsequent spike in rakali sighting reports sent to the Conservancy has included some really interesting observations (for example, as described on page 3) and several first-occurrence records for urban creeks and lakes, again highlighting the value of citizen science to species mapping.

FORTHCOMING APC TALK

The next APC talk about platypus conservation will be on Friday 2 October, starting 5.30 pm at Bendigo Library in central Victoria. The event is being hosted by the Wildlife Rescue Information Network and City of Greater Bendigo as part of Wildlife Awareness Month.

Australian Platypus Conservancy



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