

The platy-project toolkit

How to spot,
record and enjoy
a platypus in
the wild



Thanks for signing up to take part in the platy-protect!

By taking part you'll help scientists, campaigners and community members understand more about the elusive platypus, and how we can better protect them.

This toolkit contains all the information you need to go out looking for a platypus, and what to do if you do (or don't) spot one. It also covers how to host a survey event with friends, family or people in your local community, to increase your chances of spotting a platypus and raise much-needed awareness of this incredible creature.

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How to spot a platypus



Choose a strategic location

Use the [platy-project map](#) to help you choose a strategic location to look for platypuses.

The map is colour-coded by platypus sightings:

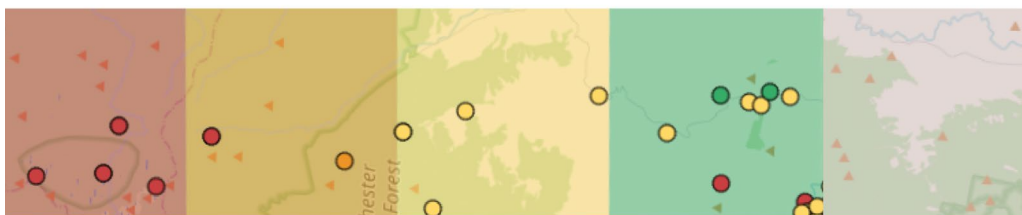
Red and orange: Areas in red and orange show where a platypus hasn't been recorded since 2000 or earlier. **These are the most important places to look**, because we want to know if platypus are still there or if those populations have sadly declined.

Yellow: Areas in yellow show areas with more recent sightings made between 2001 and 2010. These are important to visit too.

Green: Green represents the areas with the newest sightings, made since 2011 to now.

Grey: Grey represents areas within the platypus' distribution where no recordings have been made.

Recording a platypus in one of these areas would be really exciting!



Make sure the area is accessible. Look for places that you can get to by a car or just a short walk.

Don't visit places on private property unless you know the owner and have their permission.



Choose the right time and place

Platypuses are active mainly at night, so for most of the year the best times to see them are the hour after dawn or the hour just before dusk, though you can still get lucky during the day.

In winter and early spring they're more active during the day too, as the colder weather means they need more food so have to spend more time finding it. This is handy for humans who are hoping to see one.

Platypuses need healthy waterways to live in. Look out for sections of creeks and rivers with a good bit of bush along the banks – think trees, shrubs, ferns – with good, flowing water and places for platypuses to duck and dive as they search for tucker among rocks and logs. Find a spot where the water is calm, so you can see any ripples the animals might make.

Go searching!

So you've chosen the time of day and place you're going to search in, now it's time to head out to see if you can spot a platypus.

Before you head out, **gather your gear:**

- A phone or camera to take photos of any platypus (or other wildlife) you see
- A notebook or device to take notes about the sighting and the surrounding habitat
- A device to determine your location, such as a phone or handheld GPS
- Binoculars can help confirm sightings
- Appropriate attire: sturdy shoes for walking, sunscreen and a hat, long pants
- Anything else that you'll need to stay comfortable: food, water, wet weather gear, etc.

You're at the location, now it's time to keep an eye out.

There's no mistaking a platypus up close — the duck-bill, webbed feet and fur coat give them away — but those features are harder to make out from a distance.

Keep an eye out for ripples in the water — a sign that a platypus might be out and about. Look for well-formed 'bulls-eye' ripples or a narrow v-shaped wake in the water, both signature platypus ripples.

Look for features that distinguish a platypus from rakali, or native water-rat. Both will float low in the water with sometimes only their head and body visible. If you can see their tail, you'll notice rakali have a long tail with a white tip, while a platypus has a short, flat, rounded tail.

Look for the tell-tale movements. A platypus on the move will tend to travel along the surface of the water, diving for about a minute and then resurfacing in the same spot. A rakali will dive and swim below the water, resurfacing further away.

Being still and quiet will greatly improve your chances of seeing a platypus. See what other wildlife you can observe while you wait for a platypus to come along.

Platypus are elusive animals. Be patient when trying to spot one and don't make too much noise, or you could spook them!

Remember to search safely

- The best spot is one you can safely get to without risking harm to yourself or any wildlife
- Take care when choosing where to park and search, avoiding spots that are too steep or slippery
- Platypus are elusive animals. Be patient when trying to spot one and don't make too much noise, or you could spook them!
- Be aware of your surroundings to avoid tripping, slipping, and in hot weather, snakes
- Go with a buddy
- Be safe, use common sense, and take care not to disturb plants or animals
- If at any point you feel concerned for your safety, stop what you are doing and safely make your way back home. We don't want you getting hurt or lost, so this is very important.

How to record your findings



Capture the location

If your phone has location settings in the camera app (most do by default) this will be captured automatically. Otherwise you can use a phone or GPS to take down location. At a pinch you can estimate it after.

Upload your findings to the platy-project

Whether you were lucky enough to spot a platypus or not, log your activity on the platy-project map:

- Visit <https://platy-project.acf.org.au/> and select 'Record a sighting' to log your activity
- If you didn't see a platypus, select 'O - attempted sighting' when it asks for the number of platypus you saw.
- If you were lucky enough to spot a platypus, attach a photo if you got one.
- Include anything else you observed in the notes, like: what was the tree cover like? Were there many shrubs? Was there much litter in the water or on the banks? What time of day was it? What was the weather like? For how long did you look?

Share your story

Spread the word about taking part in the platy-project by sharing on social media.

- Post photos to social media using the hashtag #platypusproject.
You can tag ACF on Facebook, Instagram (@ausconservation) or Twitter (@AusConservation).
- Get in touch with us at platypus@acf.org.au if you'd like to pass on anything about your experience.
- You can also upload photos of other plants and animals to a public and free community science app like iNaturalist.



How to host a survey event

What's better than seeing a platypus in the wild? Sharing the experience with good company!

This is a great opportunity to get out in nature with your friends, family and neighbours. Here's how to host a survey event in your community:

Choose a time and place

Follow the tips in this toolkit under "How to spot a platypus" to choose a strategic location for your survey.

When hosting a group event, choose a location that can cater for more people (e.g. enough parking spaces for more cars) and with an accessible stretch of river long enough that a group of people can station themselves at intervals along it.

If you can, check out the site before settling on it to ensure its suitability for the group and its accessibility.

Choose a time at dawn or dusk to increase your chances of seeing a platypus, or if that's difficult you can try your luck at a different time of day.

Create your event on our website

Host your event on the platy-project website so that people in your community can RSVP and join in! It's an easy way to keep track of RSVPs and to connect with new people in your area.

Visit <https://platy-project.acf.org.au> and select 'new event', then:

- Fill in the details about the event name, date, time and location
- Include a description of your event including if there will be food, the exact meeting location, and anything else that's important for guests to know
- Once you click submit you'll receive an email confirming the details of your event
- Everytime someone RSVPs to your event you'll receive an email notification with their contact details.



Communicate with RSVPs

- Send an event confirmation text or call RSVPs a couple of days before, confirming the time, date, location and anything they need to bring (e.g. you might suggest that attendees bring food for a picnic at the end).
- Make sure you let everyone know if you need to cancel the event, for example due to severe weather.

Hosting the event on the day

Arriving at the location

- All events need to be [COVIDSafe](#). Make sure to follow the current health guidelines in your state.
- Designate a central meeting place for the group for the day and sign people in as they arrive.

Welcome everyone

- Start the event by acknowledging the country you're meeting on. If you're not sure you can check that [here](#).
- You might like to share a bit about yourself, the area, and the platy-project.
- Optional extra: do a name round of the group to acquaint participants with each other.

Brief participants on how to search for a platypus

- Use the tips in this toolkit to explain what to look out for and how to record findings.
- If people spread themselves along the waterway, ask them to note down the time that they observe a platypus. This can help determine if it was the same animal that participants saw as it traveled through the waterway.

Start searching! Encourage people to spread themselves out at intervals along the waterway to have the best chance of seeing a platypus, and allow between 30 minutes to an hour for people to survey.

Share what you've seen. Once everyone meets back at home-base, go around and ask people to share what they saw, even if they didn't get to see a platypus. Double check everyone has good records of what they saw. This is the perfect time to bust out a platy-picnic.



Wrap and follow up

Thank your guests for coming, and remember to take a group photo! You might like to upload your photo to social media using the hashtag #PlatyProject

At the conclusion of your event, or later that day, log your activity on the platy-project map:

<https://platy-project.acf.org.au> . If you saw a platypus, include a photo if you got one. If you didn't see a platypus, make some notes about how long you looked for and what the conditions were like (time of day, weather, etc).

If your group spreaded out and surveyed different parts of the creek, multiple people can upload sightings or attempted sightings separately.

The next day, send an email to attendees thanking them for their time, and remind them to upload any results of their platypus sightings to <https://platy-project.acf.org.au>. Include a group photo in your email if you took one, and perhaps invite them to your next event too!

References

Australian Platypus Monitoring Network: [How to spot a platypus in the wild](#)

Victorian Naturalist: [Monthly variation in observed activity of the Platypus Ornithorhynchus anatinus](#)

PlatypusSPOT: [Platypus or Ratypus \(sorry!\): How to distinguish platypus from rakali](#)