

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

# The World's Strangest-Looking Mammal

by Guy Belleranti

What weird-looking creature has a bill like a duck, a beaver-like tail, and clawed webbed feet like an otter? A space alien? Nope, a platypus. This mixed-up mammal lives in burrows on the edges of rivers, streams and lakes in Australia and the nearby island of Tasmania.



The Platypus is a great swimmer. It paddles with its front feet and steers with both its back feet and tail. It also uses its tail to store fat for nourishment when food is scarce.

When a platypus swims underwater it doesn't use its eyes to see where it's going. Instead it keeps its eyes, ears and nose shut so no water gets in! But then how does it find

food? Well, its bill-like snout can detect the electrical fields of shrimp, worms and its cheek pouches.



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food on its back to insects, and surface in

Since an adult platypus has a bill like a duck, it has no teeth. So how does it chew? By grinding the food between horny plates on its upper and lower jaws.

But we're still not finished with this animal's oddities. You see, the platypus is one of only two mammals that lay eggs. The other is the echidna or spiny anteater. Both of these egg-laying mammals are called monotremes. Platypus eggs aren't hard-shelled like bird eggs. Instead they are soft and leathery like reptile eggs. When they hatch the babies get nourishment by licking milk that oozes from glands in their mother's body.

Another oddity about the platypus is the venom released through spurs on their back ankles. Only male platypuses have this venom. The venom is strong enough to kill an animal as large as a dog. It is believed males use their spurs when competing with other males for mates. The spurs might also help a male platypus defend itself against predators such as foxes, water rats, hawks, owls and snakes.

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1. Where do wild platypuses live?
  - a. in the Southern Hemisphere
  - b. in the Northern Hemisphere
  - c. on islands in Alaska
  - d. in South America
2. A platypus has a tail that is similar to the tail of a...
  - a. duck
  - b. otter
  - c. beaver
  - d. dog

3. What \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Mami \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



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5. List five animals mentioned in the article that are predators of the platypus.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. Explain how a platypus uses electro-receptors to hunt.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. According to the article, what does a platypus eat?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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Match each vocabulary word from the article with the correct definition.



\_\_\_\_\_ 1. mammal

a. protect

\_\_\_\_\_ 2. steers

b. top

\_\_\_\_\_ 3. bi

with hair

\_\_\_\_\_ 4. st



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\_\_\_\_\_ 5. pecc

c. girdles, control movement

\_\_\_\_\_ 6. spurs

f. storage sack

\_\_\_\_\_ 7. defend

g. body parts that receive signals

\_\_\_\_\_ 8. receptors

h. short spikes

◆ **Now try this:** Find vocabulary words in the article and highlight them.

# ANSWER KEY

## The World's Strangest-Looking Mammal

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1. Where do wild platypuses live? **a**
- a. **in the Southern Hemisphere**
  - b. in the Northern Hemisphere
  - c. on islands in Alaska
  - d. in South America

2. A platypus has a tail that is similar to the tail of a... **c**
- a. duck
  - b. otter
  - c. **beaver**
  - d. dog

3. What  
**platy**



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4. Mami

5. List five animals mentioned in the article that are predators of the platypus.

**foxes, water rats, hawks, owls, and snakes**

6. Explain how a platypus uses electro-receptors to hunt.

**Electro-receptors are located on the platypus' bill. They sense movement from prey.**

7. According to the article, what does a platypus eat?

**They eat insects, shrimp, worms and small water animals.**

# ANSWER KEY

## The World's Strangest-Looking Mammal

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Match each vocabulary word from the article with the correct definition.



**c** 1. mammal

**a.** protect

**e** 2. steers

**b.** top

**d** 3. bill

**b** 4. sur



**PREVIEW**

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with hair

**f** 5. pouch

**e.** guides; controls movement

**h** 6. spurs

**f.** storage sack

**a** 7. defend

**g.** body parts that receive signals

**g** 8. receptors

**h.** short spikes

◆ **Now try this:** Find the vocabulary words in the article and highlight them.