

Name: _____

Echidnas

By Guy Belleranti

What mammal has spines like a hedgehog, a snout like an anteater, and lays leathery eggs like a reptile? The echidna or spiny anteater. Even though it looks like a cross between an anteater and a hedgehog, the echidna isn't closely related to either of these animals. Actually, its closest relative is the duck-billed platypus.



The echidna and platypus are the only remaining members of a primitive group of mammals called monotremes. You were probably taught that mammals do not lay eggs because their babies are born alive. While this is true for most mammals, monotremes are a little different. Monotremes are the only mammals that lay eggs.

Echidnas live mainly on the Australia's mainland, but some are also found on the nearby islands of Tasmania and New Guinea.

There are two kinds of echidnas -- the short-beaked and the long-beaked. Both have short legs with sharp claws. The echidna uses its claws to dig burrows for homes and to hide in. It also uses its claws to dig into termite mounds, ant hills and soft logs in search of ants, termites, grubs and earthworms. Then it sticks its long sticky tongue out of its pointy snout and catches a delicious buggy dinner. The echidna has no teeth, but instead grinds its food into a soft paste between hard pads on the back of its tongue and the roof of its mouth.

In addition to living in burrows some echidnas also live in hollow logs and under thick bushes. The echidna does not have spines on its belly, legs and face. However, when it rolls up, the spines on its back and sides cover the animal completely.

Echidna moms lay only one egg a year. The egg is tiny, about the size of a grape. The mother keeps the egg protected in a pouch on her belly. After 10 days the egg hatches. The baby echidna is called a puggle. The puggle licks up milk oozing from glands in the mother's pouch.

When the puggle's spines begin to grow the mother puts it in a burrow. The mother returns to feed her young every five to ten days. Once the young echidna is seven months old it is able to live on its own.

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1. Echidnas are native to...

- a. the Southern Hemisphere
- b. the Indian subcontinent
- c. Argentina
- d. Antarctica

2. Besides echidnas, what other species of mammals lay eggs?

3. Name four things that an echidna eats.

4. How are echidnas and kangaroos similar?

- a. They are both monotremes.
- b. They are about the same size.
- c. They both have large feet for hopping.
- d. They both have a pouch in their body for carrying their young.

5. Tell whether each fact is true or false. Write *T* or *F* on each line.

_____ The echidna is a type of monotreme.

_____ Echidnas have sharp teeth.

_____ Echidnas live in Tasmania.

_____ A female echidna is called a puggle.

_____ Echidna mothers take care of their young until they are about two years old.

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The scrambled words below are vocabulary words from the article. Unscramble each word and write it on the line. Please be sure each word is spelled correctly.

1. _____

n d l n i a m a

hint: large area of land that does not include islands

2. _____

h o g g e h e d

hint: small mammal covered with spines

3. _____

l l h o w o

hint: having a hole or empty space inside

4. _____

r o b u r w

hint: underground animal home

5. _____

y s p t u l a p

hint: one of only two mammals that lay eggs

6. _____

r w o s e h a r t m

hint: underground animals with no arms or legs

7. _____

u s i c d i o e l

hint: tasty; yummy

ANSWER KEY

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1. Echidnas are native to... **a**

- a. **the Southern Hemisphere**
- b. the Indian subcontinent
- c. Argentina
- d. Antarctica

2. Besides echidnas, what other species of mammals lay eggs?

platypus

(Note: Monotremes is an incorrect answer because they are not a species, but rather a category of animals.)

3. Name four things that an echidna eats.

ants, termites, grubs, and earthworms

4. How are echidnas and kangaroos similar? **d**

- a. They are both monotremes.
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F Echidnas have sharp teeth.

T Echidnas live in Tasmania.

F A female echidna is called a puggle.

F Echidna mothers take care of their young until they are about two years old.

ANSWER KEY

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The scrambled words below are vocabulary words from the article. Unscramble each word and write it on the line. Please be sure each word is spelled correctly.

1. mainland

n d l n i a m a

hint: large area of land that does not include islands

2. hedgehog

h o g g e h e d

hint: small mammal covered with spines

3. hollow

l l h o w o

hint: having a hole or empty space inside

4. burrow

r o b u r w

hint: underground animal home

5. platypus

y s p t u l a p

hint: one of only two mammals that lay eggs

6. earthworms

r w o s e h a r t m

hint: underground animals with no arms or legs

7. delicious

u s i c d i o e l

hint: tasty; yummy