



Platypus

The platypus, *Ornithorhynchus anatinus*, lives in freshwater rivers. It is found from the tropical rainforests of northern Queensland to the cold mountains of the Australian Alps and Tasmania. Platypus hunt underwater, where they swim gracefully by paddling with their front webbed feet and steering with their hind feet and beaver-like tail. Folds of skin cover their eyes and ears to prevent water from entering, and the nostrils close with a watertight seal. In this posture, a platypus can remain submerged for a minute or two and use its sensitive bill to find food.

They are bottom feeders, scooping up insects and larvae, shellfish, and worms in their bill along with bits of gravel and mud from the bottom. All this material is stored in cheek pouches and, at the surface, mashed before swallowing. Platypus do not have teeth, so the bits of gravel help them to “chew” their meal.

Platypus are one of only two monotremes – mammals which lay eggs (the echidna is the other). Female platypus seal themselves inside one of their burrow’s chambers to lay their eggs. She may produce one or two eggs; and keeps them warm by holding them between her body and her tail. The eggs hatch in about ten days. The young are about the size of jelly beans and are nursed for three to four months, until they can swim on their own.

Platypus are shy animals, and will usually dive underwater to swim away from an attacker. However if unable to escape, male platypus will try to stab an attacker with hollow spurs on their hind legs. These spurs are connected to a sac containing poison strong enough to kill a dog.

About the artist

Kristie Peters is a Wiradjuri woman from southern New South Wales and was born in Bathurst in 1980. Kristie is a twin from a large family of 15 brothers and sisters, and now resides in Canberra with her partner, six young children, and family.

Kristie’s style is a mix of contemporary and traditional, creating eye-catching artworks. She completed her Certificate IV in Aboriginal Art and Fashion Design at the Yaruna Centre, Canberra Institute of Technology and is now painting as a profession.