

Protecting the Platypus

It's cold at Camp Platypus. The residents of the **makeshift**¹ encampment huddle, drink steaming cups of tea, and warm themselves over a wood fire.



Torsten Blackwood/AFP/Getty Images

Twin Platypuses.

It is here, along the Obi Obi Creek in Australia, that protesters are trying to stop builders from digging up a platypus **habitat** to build a supermarket. A habitat is the environment in which an animal lives.

For several years the protesters have battled with police, construction workers, and officials from the supermarket chain. In summer 2005 the situation grew more intense as workers began clearing the land.

"We're not moving until we save this place," protester John Woodlands told a reporter.

Odd Duck

¹ **makeshift**: a temporary replacement

Why all the fuss about the platypus? Although the platypus is far from **rare**², it lives only on the continent of Australia. The animal is an endangered species and is protected under Australian law. It is also a weird-looking critter.

When European explorers reached Australia in the 1600s and 1700s, they first saw this animal with a furry coat, a duck-like bill, four webbed feet, and a flat tail like a paddle. The animal uses its front limbs for swimming. Its tail functions as a rudder.

The platypus acts like an amphibian, at home both on land and in the water. But the platypus is not an amphibian. It is a **mammal**. Mammals are warm-blooded animals. Most mammals, such as humans, produce milk. Specifically, the platypus is a mammal known as a **monotreme**. Unlike most mammals, monotremes lay eggs and provide milk to their young directly through the skin. Only two monotremes exist: the platypus and the **echidna (ih-KID-nah)**, or spiny anteater.

The platypus lives along the banks of eastern Australia's lakes, rivers, ponds, and streams. It uses its bill and its nose to sniff out food at the bottom of the waterways. Its large, flat, furry tail stores fat for the long winters.

Pollution is killing off the species, and the construction of homes and commercial buildings is destroying its habitat.

Construction Likely

At Camp Platypus, protesters hope the supermarket chain will rethink its decision to build the store, but that appears to be unlikely. Construction has already been done.

Nevertheless, although the platypus is an odd-looking creature, it still has a lot of friends around the world.

² **rare:** uncommon, hard to find

Platypus Fast Facts

Scientific name: *Ornithorhynchus anatinus*

Habitat: Streams, rivers, and lakes near the east coast of Australia

Description: Short, dense dark-brown fur; 2-inch-wide bill; hairless, webbed feet; flat, furry tail; 1- to 2-foot-long body

Defense: Males have spurs on their hind feet that contain poisonous venom. The animal's sting can kill a dog.

Reproduction: Females generally lay two eggs at a time. Babies attach themselves to the fur under a mother's belly to drink her milk.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. The platypus is unusual in many ways. Which of the following statements about the platypus is **not** true?

- A The platypus lives in Australia.
- B The platypus lays eggs.
- C The platypus provides milk to its young directly through the skin.
- D The platypus only has three webbed feet.

2. How does the author organize the information in this passage?

- A The author lists events of a platypus' life in chronological order.
- B The author describes an effort to save the platypus and then describes the animal in detail.
- C The author compares the viewpoints of those who want to save the platypus with those who want to destroy its habitats.
- D The author identifies the problems facing the platypus and provides some solutions.

3. Read the sentences:

1. "In summer 2005 the situation grew more intense as workers began clearing the land."
2. "'We're not moving until we save this place,' protester John Woodlands told a reporter."

How does sentence 2 relate to sentence 1?

- A Sentence 2 contrasts with sentence 1, giving an opposite opinion.
- B Sentence 2 provides details about the summer of 2005, mentioned in sentence 1.
- C Sentence 1 supports sentence 2's claim that John Woodlands would not move.
- D Sentence 2 supports sentence 1's claim that the situation grew more intense.

4. Read the sentences: "...and a flat tail like a paddle. The animal uses its front limbs for swimming. Its tail functions as a rudder."

The author uses words in these sentences to compare the platypus to a

- A dolphin
- B human
- C boat
- D wooden beam

5. What is this passage mostly about?

- A the effects of platypus protection
- B the difference between Australian and other continents' animals
- C the platypus's unique features and efforts to save them
- D differing viewpoints on the importance of saving the platypus

6. Read the sentence: "'We're not moving until we save this place,' protester John Woodlands told a reporter."

What does John Woodlands mean? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

7. Read the sentence: "Nevertheless, although the platypus is an odd-looking creature, it still has a lot of friends around the world."

What does the author mean? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence.

Many people are trying to save the platypus _____ the supermarket will probably be built anyway.

- A while
- B after
- C even though
- D because

9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.

When they reached Australia in the 1600s and 1700s, European explorers first saw this animal with a furry coat, a duck-like bill, four webbed feet, and a flat tail like a paddle.

Who? European explorers

Did what? _____

When? _____

10. Vocabulary Word: commercial (*adjective*): for profit, for the purpose of commerce.

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: _____

Teacher Guide & Answers

Passage Reading Level: Lexile 930

Featured Text Structure: Descriptive – the writer explains, defines, or illustrates a concept or topic

Passage Summary: In “Protecting the Platypus,” the author describes the features of the platypus. The platypus is an endangered animal native to Australia. Currently, platypus habitats are in danger of destruction due to construction and pollution, and protesters have organized to protect them.

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- B The platypus lays eggs.
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- D **The platypus only has three webbed feet.**

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- A The author lists events of a platypus’ life in chronological order.
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- D differing viewpoints on the importance of saving the platypus

6. Read the sentence: "'We're not moving until we save this place,' protester John Woodlands told a reporter."

What does John Woodlands mean? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

Suggested answer: The text says that "the residents of the makeshift encampment huddle, drink steaming cups of tea, and warm themselves over a wood fire." This means that people live in a temporary camp. Then it says that "protesters are trying to stop builders from digging up a platypus habitat to build a supermarket." The protesters are living in a temporary camp on the platypus habitat to save the habitat from being dug up to build a supermarket. John Woodlands means that he and the other protesters will not move from the temporary camp until the land is saved for the platypuses.

7. Read the sentence: "Nevertheless, although the platypus is an odd-looking creature, it still has a lot of friends around the world."

What does the author mean? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

Suggested answer: Many people are trying to save the platypus, as explained in the first two paragraphs. The author means that although the platypus may not look like many other creatures, there are still human beings who are taking time to ensure that its habitat is saved.

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence.

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- B after
- C **even though**
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9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.

When they reached Australia in the 1600s and 1700s, European explorers first saw this animal with a furry coat, a duck-like bill, four webbed feet, and a flat tail like a paddle.

Who? European explorers

Did what? **first saw this animal with a furry coat, a duck-like bill, four webbed feet, and a flat tail like a paddle**

When? **when they reached Australia in the 1600s and 1700s**

10. **Vocabulary Word:** commercial (*adjective*): for profit, for the purpose of commerce.

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: answers may vary.