

# Platypus and Litter

## Fact Sheet

(adapted from Australian Platypus Conservancy newsletter May 2021)



Platypus can suffer horrific injuries and often die after becoming tangled in human rubbish.

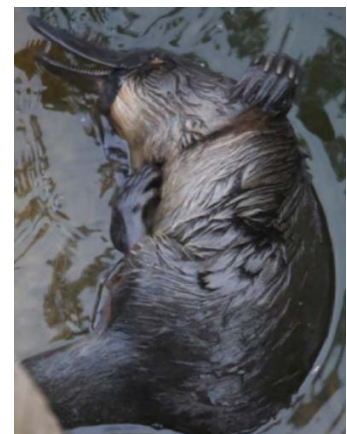
Because these animals mainly feed on bottom-dwelling bugs, they are often active in places where litter gathers. A platypus also finds it very difficult to remove loops or rings from its neck or body because its front feet, designed for swimming, are hopeless at gripping and grabbing.

Instead, a platypus grooms using its hind feet which are not long enough to pull a loop forward off its own head. In the picture below the platypus is using one of its back feet to tug at a narrow loop – possibly fishing line – around its neck. When these loops cannot be removed they often move backward along the platypus's body until they fit too snugly to move back any further. It is then that they start cutting into the skin.

Research by the Australian Platypus Conservancy has shown that on average, 4% of platypus found during live-trapping surveys in the Greater Melbourne region (1 in every 25 animals) was found to be encircled by rubbish.

Items were 10-24cm in circumference and included;

- Fishing line
- Cable-ties
- A rubber band
- Plastic bangles
- Elastic hair ties
- A hospital wrist band
- Part of a six-pack holder
- String
- Plastic sealing rings from food jars



In rural creeks and rivers entanglement is not as common but the cases that do occur involve very harmful materials such as fishing line.

It has been found that young platypus are more likely than adults to entangle themselves and female platypus are more likely than males.

### What can be done ?

- Pollution traps can be installed to filter rubbish travelling with stormwater into waterways but these must be cleaned often and are not designed to remove the fine materials that entangle platypus. They also do not help remove items discarded whilst swimming/fishing.
- Everyone can play their part by;
  - Picking up litter wherever you are but especially near waterways
  - Cutting through metal, rubber or plastic loops/rings before putting them in the bin