

# THE SHORT-BEAKED ECHIDNA

There are two species of echidna, the short-beaked echidna of Australia and the long-beaked echidna of New Guinea. Here at Lone Pine, we exhibit the short-beaked echidna *Tachyglossus aculeatus* meaning “spiny fast-tongue”.



## HABITAT

Short-beaked echidnas live in a variety of habitats all over Australia. They are classed as common and secure in their habitat.

They are solitary and nomadic; having no fixed nest sites. They are usually found hiding amongst fallen timber, in hollow logs or under thick bushes.

## DIET

Being nocturnal, echidnas emerge at night to search for food. They are equipped with strong forelimbs, which enable them to break open ant and termite nests. They also use their narrow snout and long tongue to probe the tunnels of the nests and trap insects on a coating of sticky saliva.

## SELF DEFENCE

When disturbed or threatened, the echidna curls into a ball of radiating spines. This defence mechanism deters most predators. It is also able to dig itself below the soil surface and extend its spines to wedge into awkward crevices.

Echidnas have fur in between their sharp spines, for insulation. The colder the climate in which it is found, the longer the fur.

## BREEDING

Echidnas are monotremes, meaning that they are egg-laying mammals.

Mating occurs in the months of July and August. After a successful mating, female echidnas develop a temporary pouch into which a single, thin-shelled egg is laid, two weeks after mating. The egg takes 10 days to hatch.

The echidna lacks nipples. Instead, the baby drinks milk from the pores of the mother's mammary glands, located on her stomach. The baby will drink about 20% of its body weight at each feed.

The baby stays in the pouch for 50 to 60 days. Once it has left the pouch, the baby is left in a nursery burrow while the mother forages for food. She often forages for several days at a time. It is not known at what age the young are weaned, but juveniles tend to be seen outside the burrow at about 7 months of age.



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