

Wildlife Matters

MOGGILL CREEK CATCHMENT GROUP

Spiky Sightings

FOR an animal that has a distribution ALL over Australia, sightings of the Short-beaked Echidna are still met with delight and, especially by some, amazement when discovered in suburban areas. While these monotremes (egg-laying mammals) have quite a specialised diet of primarily ants and termites (and may also feed on earthworms and the larvae of insects), these food items can be found in a variety of different habitats, including backyards, parks and bushland reserves.



Short-beaked Echidna (*Tachyglossus aculeatus*) Photo: Rebecca Bain

Echidnas are armed with two handy adaptations to access and feed on these food sources. Their powerful forearms with sturdy claws can easily tear apart ant nests, termite mounds and dead logs. They can then use their long, sticky tongue (up to 15 – 18 cm) to lick or slurp up any exposed insects. Whilst echidnas are primarily crepuscular (active at dawn and dusk), their activity patterns can change depending on the season – they will more likely be out and about at night during warmer months, and during the day when daytime temperatures aren't too high. So it's worth always being on the lookout! You might even catch one having a swim. It is also good to be mindful of the fact that echidnas may be crossing our roads so please keep a lookout when driving. A particularly interesting behaviour occurs during the breeding season of the echidna, June to early September. Courtship of echidnas can result in what is known as an echidna train – up to 11 individuals can make up this train! Male echidnas follow a female echidna situated at the head of the train for several days, and the group will forage, walk and rest together during this period. Now THAT would be impressive to witness.

A citizen science app, EchidnaCSI, has been developed to improve knowledge on wild populations – visit <https://www.adelaide.edu.au/environment/give/echidna-csi> for more info. Happy echidna spotting!

Rebecca Bain

VIST MCGG: www.moggillcreek.org.au