

# Short-Beaked Echidna

**Scientific Name:** *Tachyglossus aculeatus*

**Class:** Mammalia

**Order:** Monotremata

**Family:** Tachyglossidae



The echidna's head and body length are from 12-18 inches and weighs between 5-17 pounds. Males are 25% larger than females. The spiny coat provides an excellent defense. When suddenly disturbed on hard ground an echidna curls up into a spiky ball. If disturbed on soft soil it may dig rapidly straight down, like a sinking ship, until all that can be seen are the spines of the well-protected back. Their sense of hearing is very good, and they can hear humans approaching and take cover long before they can be seen. Food is located by sense of smell. Adult echidnas do not have teeth. The tongue is covered in sticky saliva that helps them capture insects.

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## Range

Australia, Tasmania, New Guinea

## Habitat

Almost all types of terrain, from semi-arid to alpine

## Gestation

Incubation: About 10 days

## Litter

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## Behavior

Short-beaked Echidnas are solitary animals, inhabiting a home range which varies in size depending on the environment. In wet forest with abundant food the home range is about 124 acres. There is no fixed shelter site. Echidnas take shelter in hollow logs, under piles of rubble and brush and under thick clumps of vegetation. Sometimes they dig shallow burrows as long as 4 feet, which may be reused. Females incubating egg or suckling young has a fixed burrow. The home ranges of several individuals overlap. Echidnas are usually active at dusk and dawn, but during the hot summer they are nocturnal, and during cold periods they may be diurnal.

## Reproduction

During the mating season (June – August on mainland Australia) the female leaves a scent track. This attracts males in overlapping ranges. The only time Echidnas are observed in groups is during the mating season, and on the only occasion when the sex of individuals in such a group was determined, the group consisted of one female being followed by a line of five males. In the breeding season the female develops a crescentic fold of skin which forms a pocket on the abdomen. The single grape-sized egg is laid into the pouch by extension of the cloaca while the female lies on her back. They become fully independent and move out to find their own territory after about a year.

## Wild Diet

Primarily ants and termites