Peculiar platypus

1. The platypus is indeed a peculiar creature. In fact, the first scientist to examine a platypus specimen that had been sent to him thought a trick was being played on him. He believed the creature had been made by sewing parts of different animals together very carefully!

2. If you look carefully at a platypus you'll understand why the scientist first thought that way. It has the bill and webbed feet of a duck, a tail shaped like a beaver's and the body shape and fur of an otter!

burrow

3. Scientists have discovered a lot more about this unique animal. It is found only in the streams and shallow rivers in eastern parts of the Australian mainland and Tasmania. The platypus swims smoothly through the water by paddling with its strong, webbed front feet and using its hind feet and wide, flat tail to steer. The platypus is usually a deep brown colour on its top half and golden or silky grey underneath. An adult platypus grows from 45 cm to 60 cm in length, with a female generally being smaller than a male. The male has a poisonous spur on the inside of each hind leg.

female platypus

4. It searches for food for about 12 hours a day by diving to the bottom of the water. The platypus uses its sensitive bill to find insect larvae, worms and shellfish. These are scooped up and stored in cheek pouches. When the platypus returns to the surface it chews its food with the help of small, horny pads, as it has no teeth. When it is not searching and eating food, the platypus rests and sleeps in a burrow it digs along the bank, just above the water level.

5. Another peculiar fact about the platypus is that although it is a mammal, its young are not born alive—it lays eggs! It is a monotreme, an egg-laying mammal. The female platypus builds a nesting burrow and blocks it off with mud to stop predators. In there, she usually lays two small, leathery eggs which hatch after about 10 days. She feeds her tiny babies milk which oozes out from pores on her belly. After four months, the young have grown enough to swim on their own and search for food.