

28 August 2009

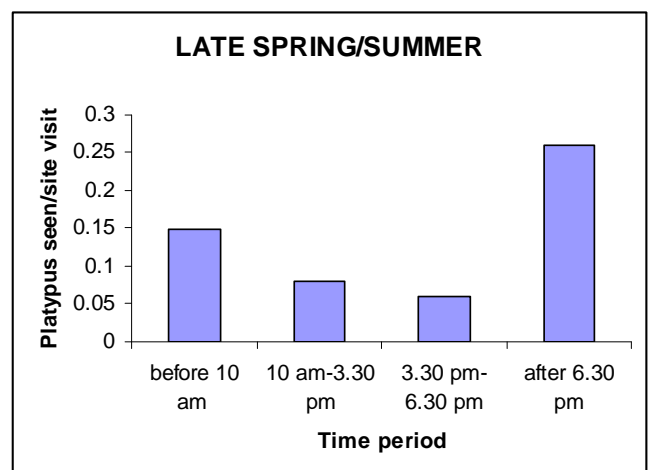
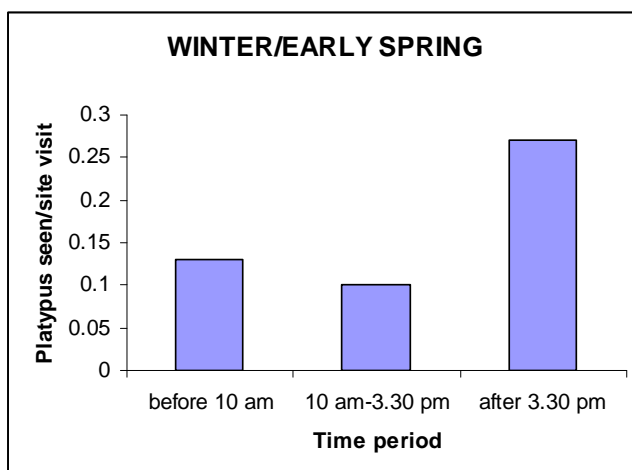
Hello all,

We know from radio-tracking studies that platypus are active mainly after dark, presumably because they feel less vulnerable to predators. However, as many of you know from first-hand experience, it is by no means uncommon for a platypus to be seen feeding happily at midday. So, based on data provided by Platypus Count volunteers, how does the likelihood of seeing a platypus actually vary through the day?

The graphs below summarise the frequency of platypus sightings (in terms of how many animals were seen on average in a given site visit) along the middle reaches of the Yarra River (Templestowe-Warrandyte) at different times of the day in winter and early spring (June-September) and late spring and summer (November-February) from November 2007 to February 2009. Only three time periods are shown for the colder months as day length is considerably shorter in June-September as compared to November-February.

As you can see, platypus were active throughout the day in both summer and winter. However, the frequency of sightings was consistently higher in the evening (within 1.5-2.5 hours of dusk) than in the morning (within 2.5-4 hours of dawn). This probably reflects asymmetry in the activity patterns of *Platypus Count* participants rather than the animals themselves: more than 60% of evening site visits were conducted within an hour of dusk, whereas less than 10% of morning site visits were completed within an hour of dawn!

In both seasons, the lowest rate of sightings occurred from mid-morning to late afternoon. On average, a person who consistently watched for platypus before 10 am would have seen an animal on about 40% more occasions than someone who always looked for the animals between 10 am and 3.30 in the afternoon – this is why sightings made in the middle of the day are treated separately to those obtained either earlier or later when we calculate the average rate of monthly sightings for an area. On the other hand, those who are optimists by nature may prefer to focus on the fact that even at the least promising time of day in late spring and summer (3.30-6.30 pm), a platypus could still be seen on 6% of survey sessions conducted along the middle reaches of the Yarra from 2007 to 2009.



Along the middle reaches of the Yarra River, the average rate of platypus sightings per site visit in Manningham and Banyule from March to May 2009 (e.g. Viewbank 0.03, Templestowe 0.08) were very similar to those recorded in the previous quarter (Viewbank 0.02, Templestowe 0.11). Similarly, there was little difference in how frequently platypus were seen in this area in March-May 2009 as compared to the sightings rate in March-May 2008 (Viewbank 0.01, Templestowe 0.10). In turn, this supports the conclusion that relatively few females bred successfully in the middle Yarra this year (based on the flat rate of sightings since the start of the year, when lactating females should have contributed to a spike in the diurnal activity) but that the number of resident animals has at least remained relatively unchanged from early 2008 to early 2009.

The other news from the Yarra catchment is that we've had an influx of new participants joining *Platypus Count* in recent months. We're particularly pleased with the response in Warburton (located near the top of the Yarra River catchment in the Shire of Yarra Ranges), where five persons have registered as volunteers in the last two weeks. A community information session on the program will be held this coming weekend at Yarra Glen, which is located roughly midway between Warburton and Viewbank.

Ongoing strong support by ACT Waterwatch and ACT Parks Conservation and Lands has also fostered steady growth in the number of persons contributing to *Platypus Count* in and near Canberra. Participants are now registered to monitor platypus (and water-rats) along the Queanbeyan and Molonglo Rivers, Ginninderra and Jerrabomberra Creeks, the Tidbinbilla Wetlands and sites along the Murrumbidgee River. Most persons have joined the program within the last three months, and we look forward with great interest to seeing their results for the current quarter. Meanwhile, results for the Queanbeyan River in the March-May quarter have helped to confirm that this is a very good place to track platypus numbers, with 0.18 platypus seen on average per site visit in May. By comparison, the frequency of water-rat sightings was actually somewhat higher in the same period, with 0.24 animals seen on average per site visit.

Elsewhere, persons have recently joined *Platypus Count* in order to help monitor the platypus populations occupying Skenes Creek and the Barham River in the Otways region of Victoria, Broken Creek (not far from Benalla) and One Mile Creek (near Wangaratta). They join persons already registered to record platypus sightings along the Delatite River near Mansfield in Victoria, the Agnes River in South Gippsland, and the Bombala and Delegate Rivers and Tantawangalo Creek in southeastern New South Wales. Over the next six weeks, the APC will also be holding *Platypus Count* community information sessions for the first time in the upper Morwell River catchment (not far from Traralgon in West Gippsland) and the Murray River catchment upstream of Lake Hume.

Happy Platypus Counting!

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