



Ripple effect may help ACT's platypus census

By Natasha Rudra

A silent ripple or the sight of a V-shaped wake in Lake Burley Griffin could be clues to the secret life of the platypus.

The ACT Government wants Canberrans to keep an eye out for the elusive creatures as they walk or jog along the territory's rivers and waterways.

It's part of the Upper Murrumbidgee and ACT Waterwatch program, with researchers compiling a census that will offer valuable data about the ACT's platypus population.

The platypus is a good indicator of river and water health and Waterwatch wants Canberrans to report any sightings of the animal.

ACT Waterwatch's Molonglo coordinator, Stephen Skinner, said people might find it difficult to spot a platypus until they had made a couple of

successful sightings and familiarised themselves with the animals.

"Once you've seen them one or two times you start being able to know what to look for," he said.

"There are people who will tell you that they can sit at a certain restaurant not far from the water and see the platypus."

People should look for a ripple as the platypus surfaced and dived, or the wake as it moved through the water.

"You look for two kinds of ripples. They make a ring ripple like a stone ripple," Mr Skinner said.

"They [also] make a wide V. If you're watching a water rat you'll see a double V. And a cormorant will make a splash."

He said platypuses were reasonably common in the Queanbeyan River and there was evidence of platypus families

in the Murrumbidgee and the east basin of Lake Burley Griffin.

ACT Waterwatch facilitator Tanya Rucosky Noakes said people who spotted the creatures could report their sightings online or fill out a census sheet, available in copies of the *Chronicle*, which is published by Fairfax, owner of *The Canberra Times*.

Ms Rucosky Noakes said results from the platypus census would be available from December this year.

Environment Minister Simon Corbell encouraged Canberrans to take a moment on their walks or fishing expeditions to watch out for platypuses.

He said that he'd never spotted one himself as he didn't live near a river.

For more information go to www.act.waterwatch.org.au



COMBING THE BANKS: ACT Waterwatch facilitator Tanya Rucosky Noakes searches for platypuses at the Molonglo River near Pialligo. Photo: ANDREW SHEARGOLD