

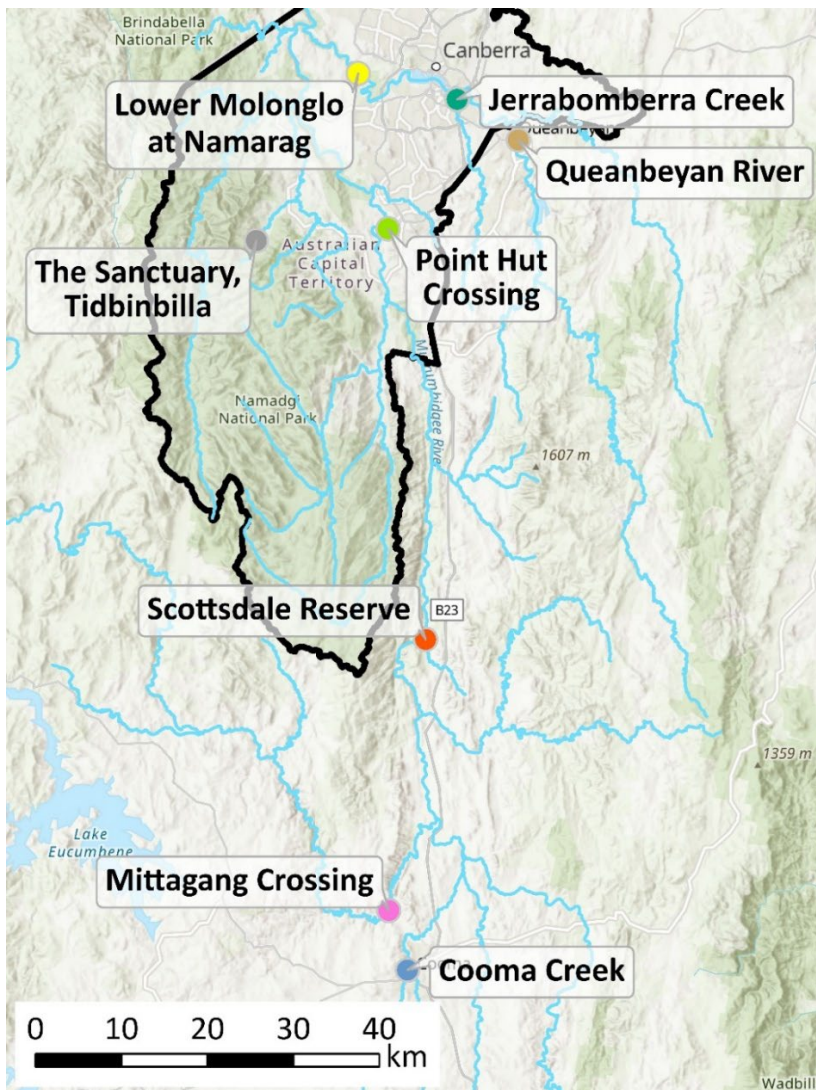
PLATYPUS (MULUNGGANG) MONTH AUGUST 2024

Platypus Month surveys are conducted on Ngunnawal and Ngarigo country. Upper Murrumbidgee Waterwatch acknowledges the continued connection that the traditional owners have to these lands and waterways. Mulunggang are a significant totem for Ngunnawal and their presence indicates healthy and abundant landscape and waterways.

August 2024 was another successful Platypus Month for the Upper Murrumbidgee region. Engagement this year was bigger than ever with over 700 people signing up for Platypus Walks and Surveys and many more people submitting their own sightings on the Waterwatch Platty and Ratty Portal. The Platypus walks were very popular providing a great opportunity for people to learn more about regional platypus and rakali spotting, Ngunnawal perspectives on Mulunggang and waterways and finding out what is involved in the Platypus surveys.



More than 200 enthusiastic volunteers helped to carry out our full complement of 34 group surveys (17 at dawn and 17 at dusk) at 8 sites across the region. With dry, calm, and mostly mild weather, conditions were ideal for spotting platypus and rakali in our local waterways and no volunteers got snowed on this year. Continuing to run surveys of this scale and effort, consistently over many years, is the best way to collect robust and reliable data and build up a picture of platypus and rakali population patterns in our region.



Map 1: 34 group surveys were conducted at eight sites across the ACT region in August 2023.



Volunteers scanning for platypus and rakali at Jerrabomberra Wetlands (left) and Queanbeyan River (right).

We were happy to see both platypus and rakali at all of the 8 survey sites this year.

Platypus numbers increased compared to recent years, with a **total of 29 individual platypus detected** across all 8 survey sites. The Queanbeyan River and Point Hut Crossing platypus populations were particularly active, with 5 individuals spotted at both these sites. Some lucky volunteers at Queanbeyan even witnessed a chase between a pair of platypus who appeared to be settling a territorial dispute. Platypus numbers at the Lower Molonglo site remained steady at 3 individuals.

It was encouraging to see 4 platypus at Scottsdale Bush Heritage reserve, up from 2 last year. We were also happy to record a platypus at Cooma Creek, as volunteers had noticed sand and sediment build up in the creek at this site, which smothers waterbug habitat. As platypus need to eat about a third of their bodyweight in waterbugs every day, healthy waterbug numbers are vital!

The number of rakali seen increased to 19 this year. Jerrabomberra Creek was again a Rakali hotspot, recording 6 individuals. Point Hut Crossing and the Queanbeyan River also recorded strong rakali numbers, with 3 and 4 individuals spotted, respectively. The Lower Molonglo, Cooma Creek, Mittagang Crossing and Scottsdale Reserve sites all recorded 1 rakali each.

Two rakali were recorded at The Sanctuary, Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve, along with 7 platypus – a typical number for surveys at this site in the last few years. Interestingly, this is only a fraction of the 21 (!) individual platypus found over two trapping sessions at The Sanctuary last summer, by a University of NSW trapping study. The protected environment of The Sanctuary likely supports a larger than usual platypus population in a relatively small area. Still, this difference between surveys and trapping results suggests that the platypus we spot are not all of the platypus present at a site. It would be great to do more trapping work to better understand how many platypus are going under the radar at other survey sites.

Table 1: Number of Rakali and Platypus detected during surveys in 2023 (2022 numbers in brackets)

Location	Surveys	Number of individual Rakali	Number of individual Platypus
Lower Molonglo River at Namarag	4	1 (1)	3 (3)
Jerrabomberra Creek within Nature Reserve	4	6 (7)	1 (1)
The Sanctuary, Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve	4	2 (1)	7 (7)
Queanbeyan River, Queanbeyan	4	4 (3)	5 (4)
Murrumbidgee River, Point Hut Crossing	4	3 (1)	5 (3)
Murrumbidgee River, Scottsdale Bush Heritage Reserve	6	1 (0)	4 (2)
Murrumbidgee River, Mittagang Crossing (near Cooma)	4	1 (1)	3 (3)
Cooma Creek, Cooma	4	1 (2)	1 (1)
Total	34	19 (16)	29 (23)

Box 1: Even when they missed out on catching a glimpse of a platypus, survey participants found some inspiration while gazing across the water.

Platypus survey poem by David Stead

Platypii or platypuses,
That occupied my mind
Sitting on the riverbank
In the dark, and somewhat blind.

Dawn’s early light crept through the bush
To brighten up the creek.
It’s all to do with the origin, you see –
Is it Latin or is it Greek?

A more detailed breakdown of the numbers from this year, along with comparisons to previous years’ surveys, is available online at the [Platypus Month Data Dashboard](#). And remember you can record any platypus or rakali sightings in the ACT region on the [Platy and Ratty Portal](#), year round.



Survey volunteers at Scottsdale Bush Heritage Reserve. Photo: Eliza McRae/Bush Heritage Australia

If you are keen to do even more platypus data collecting between now and next August, we have set up some sites on the Australian Platypus Conservancy's (APC) [Australian Platypus Monitoring Network](#) page (go to 'View Findings' to see the sites). The sites overlap with our survey areas and are aimed at gaining a better understanding of platypus numbers over the course of the year. This activity suits people who would regularly visit these areas, and can look for platypus there once or twice a week for around ten minutes at a time. The more people that sign up to a site the better, as this will increase the number of data points for that site and improve confidence in the data. Get in touch with us at [Waterwatch](#) if you think you may be interested, and we will be happy to talk through what is involved.

Upper Murrumbidgee Waterwatch receives funding from the ACT Government, and from Icon Water who support the implementation of the program in the Cooma-Monaro region. Many thanks to both these funding sources that enable Waterwatch to monitor platypus on a broad, catchment scale. Thanks also to staff at Scottsdale Bush Heritage Reserve and at Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve who collaborated with Waterwatch to conduct 10 of the 34 group surveys. This adds valuable data to the mix that Waterwatch would not otherwise have the capacity to collect. And a huge thank you to the volunteers – we hope to see you again in 2025!