

The Star Page

Echidnas (e-kid-nas)

Echidnas are egg-laying mammals that are covered with spines. The female deposits a single egg in her pouch while lying on her back. The egg is about the size of a grape. It hatches about 10 days later, but the young echidna (called a puggle) stays in its mother's pouch and feeds from milk patches until its spines begin to develop.

There are two types of echidnas: short-beaked echidnas and long-beaked echidnas. Both types have snouts, which they use to find food. Echidnas use their long, sticky tongues to catch their food. Because they do not have teeth, they use their tongues to grind food in their mouths. An echidna's favorite foods are termites and ants. This is why echidnas have the nickname "spiny anteaters."

An echidna's spines are its protection. If threatened, the echidna curls up in a ball, offering a mouthful of sharp spines to other animal attackers. On soft soil, it uses its long front claws to bury itself and escape heat and disturbances. The echidna has short but powerful legs, and it can dig a hole rapidly in soft or hard ground. But the echidna does not live in a permanent shelter. Instead, it roams around and finds refuge in hollow logs, in thick brush, or in holes around the roots of trees.

Echidnas are found in Australia and New Guinea. Short-beaked echidnas are common, but scientists believe that long-beaked echidnas are endangered.