

PREFACE

When I left the University of Canterbury in New Zealand at the end of the 1960s, my knowledge of the platypus was confined to its brief mention in vertebrate biology lectures and several diagrams, with associated text, in JZ Young's 1962 edition of *The Life of Vertebrates*. Little did I know then that, within two years of graduating in Zoology, I would begin to study this unique Australian animal and continue to do so for the next 35 years. The first UNSW Press edition of *The Platypus* was published in 1984. This hard-cover volume featured Dominic Fanning's excellent line drawings reproduced on art-quality paper. Revised editions of the book, entitled *The platypus: A unique mammal*, were published in 1989 and 1995 as part of the UNSW Press Natural History Series. In the previous volumes, there was an introductory chapter, followed by four additional chapters dealing with the biology of the platypus in response to seasonal changes. The current edition takes a more traditional approach, based on major subject areas. The final chapter is a series of frequently asked questions (FAQ), divided into subject areas/chapters, which give the reader quick access to particular areas of interest. Like the previous editions and many of the other books in the Natural History Series, the current edition is aimed predominantly at the layperson and references are not cited in the text. However, for readers who wish to find out more detail, a chapter-by-chapter bibliography is supplied at the end of the book. Using this bibliography, a reader should be able to locate detailed reference material, either by consulting the references themselves or by going to their bibliographies, a certain number of which are review articles or books.

There are numerous people without whom neither this nor the previous editions of *The Platypus* could have been written. The first to mention are, of course, the relatively small group of researchers and many volunteers whose dedicated work produced the subject material upon which the book is based. Several individuals deserve special mention. My wife, Gina, whose life and aspirations over the years have been frequently affected by the whims of *Ornithorhynchus anatinus*, deserves special thanks. She has supported me throughout the research, the field work and the writing. My very patient brother, Donald Grant, has read, commented on and improved all four volumes of the book. Peter and Meredith Temple-Smith also read and reviewed this and the previous editions. Peter has been a valued friend and