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## INTRODUCTION



*'... the animal of all time'.*

MERV GRIFFITHS (ca 1989)

**W**hen first discovered by Europeans, the platypus was thought to be a fake. Various dried or pickled specimens, reaching Britain and Europe at the end of the 18th century, were closely examined by naturalists and scientists determined to find the places where the different bits had been stitched together by a wily antipodean taxidermist. None were found and gradually, but with considerable consternation, acrimony and argument among eminent biologists of the time, the species was finally recognised as a unique mammal indeed, perhaps the 'animal of all time'.

### **The Monotremes: the egg-laying mammals**

The Class Mammalia consists of two distinct sub-classes, those that give birth to live young (Sub-class Theria – the eutherian or placental and the marsupial mammals) and those that lay eggs (Sub-class Prototheria – the monotremes). There are two living families of monotremes: the echidnas or spiny ant-eaters (Family Tachyglossidae) and the platypus (Family