

it is only by the little rings which this operation creates upon the glassy surface that its presence can be detected. I have frequently come suddenly upon it while ascending the reedy sides of the Derwent in a boat, when it instantly dived, with an audible splash, caused apparently by the hasty flap of its broad tail. I could say much more respecting the habits of this curious quadruped. In the volume of the "Transactions of the Zoological Society" above referred to, Mr. Bennett states that:—

"The *Ornithorhynchus* is known to the colonists by the name of *Water-Mole*, from some resemblance which it is supposed to bear to the common European Mole, *Talpa Europæa*, Linn.: by the native tribes at Bathurst and Goulburn Plains, and in the Yas, Murrumbidgee, and Tumat countries, I found it designated by the name of *Mullangong* or *Tambreet*; but the latter is more in use among them than the former. It is very abundant in the river Yas, particularly in the tranquil parts of the stream called 'ponds,' the surface of which is covered with various aquatic plants. On perceiving it, the spectator must remain perfectly stationary, as the slightest noise or movement would cause its instant disappearance, so acute is it in sight or hearing, or perhaps both; and it seldom reappears when it has been frightened. By remaining perfectly quiet when the animal is 'up,' the spectator is enabled to obtain an excellent view of its movements; it seldom, however, remains longer than one or two minutes, playing and paddling on the surface, soon diving again and reappearing a short distance above or below, generally according to the direction in which it dives, which it does head foremost.

"The various contradictory accounts that have been given, on the authority of the aborigines, as to the animal laying eggs and hatching them, induced me to take some pains to find out the cause of error, and being perfectly satisfied, from an internal examination of a female, that *ova* were produced in the *uteri*, I could the more readily determine the accuracy or inaccuracy of the accounts which I might receive from the natives.

"The Yas natives at first asserted that the animal lays eggs, but shortly afterwards contradicted themselves. In the Tumat country the answers were readily and satisfactorily given—"No egg tumble down; pickaninny make tumble down"—which accorded with my own observations.

"On the 7th of October, I accompanied an aborigine, called Daraga, to the banks of the Yas, to see the burrow of an *Ornithorhynchus*, from which, he told me, the young had been taken last summer. I asked him, 'What for you dig up *Mullangong*?' 'Murry budgereee patta' (Very good to eat), was his reply. On arriving at the spot, situated on a steep bank close to the river, about which long grass and various other herbaceous plants abounded, my guide, putting aside the long grass, displayed the entrance to the burrow, distant rather more than a foot from the water's edge. In digging up this retreat the natives had not laid it entirely open, but had delved holes at certain distances, and introduced a stick to ascertain its direction previously to again digging down upon it. By this method they were enabled to explore the whole extent with less labour than by laying it open from end to end. The termination of the burrow was broader than any other part, nearly oval in form, and strewn at the bottom with dry river weeds, &c., a quantity of which still remained. The whole of the interior was smooth, extending about twenty feet in a serpentine direction up the bank. It had one entrance near the water's edge, and another under the water, communicating with the interior by an opening just within the upper entrance. It is no doubt by the latter that the animal seeks refuge when it is seen to dive and not to rise again to the surface.

"On examining the cheek-pouches or the stomachs of these animals, I always observed the food to consist of river insects, very small shell-fish, &c., comminuted and mingled with mud or gravel: this latter might be required to aid digestion, as I never observed the food unmingled with it. The natives say that they also feed on river weeds; but I never found remains of that description of food in their pouches. Mr. George MacLeay informed me that he had shot some, in a part of the Wollondilly River, having river weeds in their pouches; but he observed that in that part of the river aquatic insects were very scarce. The young are suckled at first, and afterwards fed with insects, &c., mingled with mud.

"Having captured one alive, I placed it in a cask, with grass, mud, water, and everything necessary to make it comfortable. It ran round its place of confinement, scratching and making great efforts to get out; but finding them useless, became quite tranquil, contracted itself into a small compass, and soon fell asleep. At night it became very restless, and diligently sought to escape, going round the cask with the fore paws raised against the sides and the webs thrown back, and scratching violently with the claws of the fore feet, as if to burrow its way out. In the morning I found it fast asleep, with the tail turned inwards, the head and beak under the breast, and the body contracted into a very small compass; subsequently, however, I observed it sleeping with the tail turned inwards, the body contracted, and the beak protruded. When disturbed from its sleep, it uttered a noise something like the growl of a puppy, but in a softer and more harmonious key. Although quiet for the greater part of the day, it constantly made efforts to escape, and uttered a growling noise during the night."

Shortly after this, Mr. Bennett started for Sydney, taking with him his interesting captive. "*En route*," he availed himself of the vicinity of some ponds, inhabited by these animals, to give it a little recreation; "and accordingly tied a long cord to its leg and roused it from its sleep; when placed on the bank it soon found its way to the water, and travelled up the stream, apparently delighting in those places which most abounded with aquatic weeds. Although it dived in deep water, it appeared to prefer keeping close