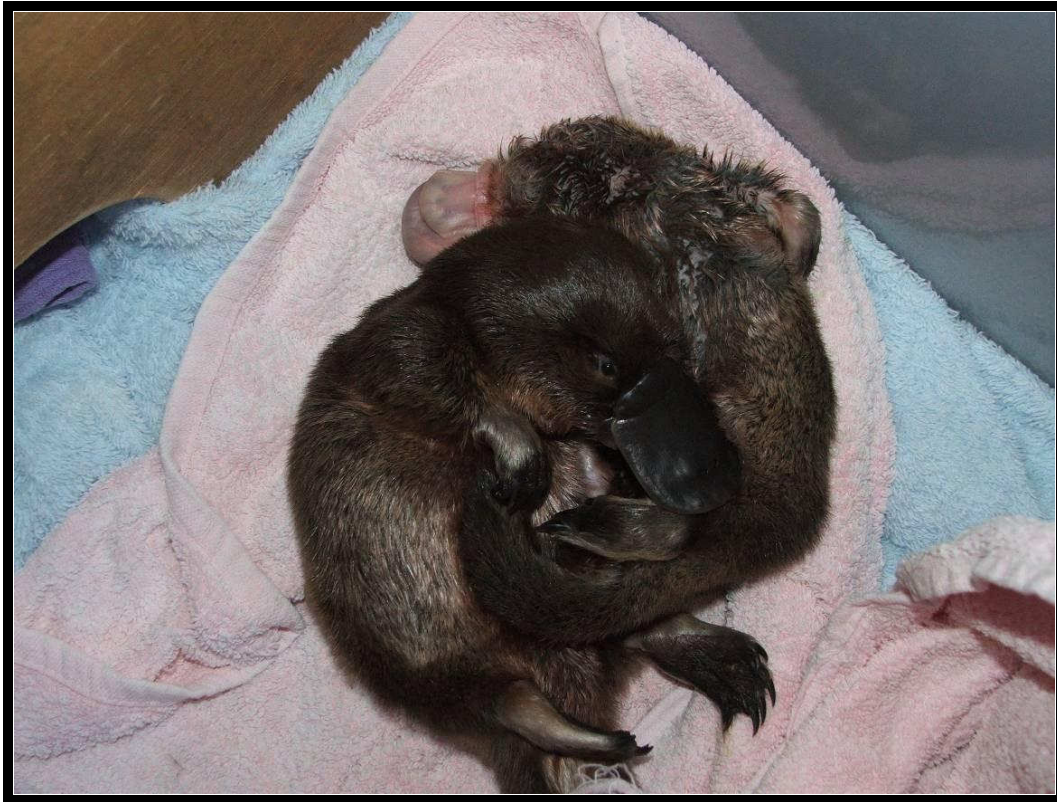


The Platypus Diary

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ABSTRACT: Over the last few months I have had the amazing privilege of raising three baby platypus, it has been over fifteen years since I looked after my last one so to have three come into care all a week apart was both sad and exciting. All were male and all were desperately ill.

During the following weeks I documented everything, in the past I had no idea that what I had done was so rare. On the day that the first one arrived (Trey) I was on the internet, and contacting everyone I knew to try and find the most updated information that I could; I also read everything I could get my hands on but what I discovered was nothing had changed, formulas were still being played with, feeding regimens were not correct and in all the years that had passed nothing in the care of infants had changed. So the three little platypus became the guinea pigs as I desperately tried to remember what I had done in the past and what I could do to improve the standards for their care in the future.



(Trey and Finn)

With my handrearing notes far from finished this is an abstract from them:

Raising platypus requires the same amount of research, observation, time and commitment as raising any other species. It requires a huge amount of time, the right equipment, endless crayfish and a lot of water!

The highlights of raising Trey, Finn and Zeke this year have been many, I have learnt so much about behaviour, personalities, diet, feeding and so much more.

When Trey first came into care I was eager to find out what had changed in the handrearing of platypus over the years, after many phone calls, a lot of research and internet searches I realized that there was still a lot unknown and that nothing had changed in the rearing of them. I searched my memory for what I had done in the past and decided to repeat what I had done back then, which was different than what I had read and been told by other facilities, but as the two I had raised in the past were pink and fat when they came into care and were released as very fat healthy juveniles I decided to stick with what I knew, and to try and improve on that.

Housing:

Both Trey and Finn were in a critical condition when they came into care both were emaciated, and very tiny for their age Trey also had an exudative dermatitis across his body. They were housed in a large plastic container that had a wooden divider with an entrance cut into it and a lid with wire netting for ventilation; they were housed in these until they began to swim.



Once they were spending a lot of time in the water they moved to an insulated box that was completely enclosed and lined with high density foam with a large piece of poly pipe through one end to enable them to come and go at their own discretion.

Zeke only spent one week in an inside enclosure and was then housed outside in his pool with an insulated box. Ice blocks were kept in one end of the box under the bedding during the day.



Their bedding in the first few weeks were towels that were soaked in napsan, washed then autoclaved; my hygiene was obsessive, but I was taking no chances. Seagrass was used as alternate bedding as they got older.

As both Trey and Finn were very lethargic and mostly unresponsive when they came in I tube fed them and continued this with Zeke. Tube feeding them was simple and less messy than palm feeding; the tube was placed in their mouth and placed in their cheek pouch, rather than the stomach as they are extremely difficult to intubate, and it eventually becomes uncomfortable for them. They all started on 2mls of formula per feed and rapidly progressed to 10mls within a few days, Platypus have very small stomachs and a huge caecum, so care has to be taken when feeding them, once they progress to solids they can consume nearly their bodyweight overnight.

Trey was fed Divetelact at one scoop to 30mls of pre boiled water with 1.5mls of canola oil and 1 teaspoon of impact he was fed with a 10ml syringe and a 2.7mm x 41cm feeding tube.

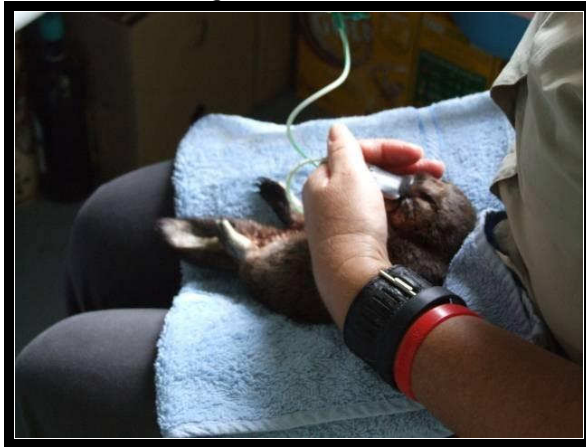
Finn and Zeke were fed Biolac 200 at one scoop to 30ml of pre boiled water 1.5mls of canola oil and 1 teaspoon of impact using a 10ml syringe and a 2.7mm x 41cm feeding tube.



They were all fed every three hours for the first 24 hours and four hourly for the following few weeks. I adopted this feeding regimen as Trey and Finn were emaciated and not consuming solids when they came into care. Zeke was older with a good body condition he was milk fed for only four weeks when he weaned himself. Trey weaned after three months.

Trey was grabbing and placing the tube himself by the end of three days; Finn was placing it after two and Zeke was placing it after the third feed.

All feeding equipment was scrubbed in hot soapy water, rinsed then soaked in Milton sterilizing solution, rinsed again and steam sterilized.



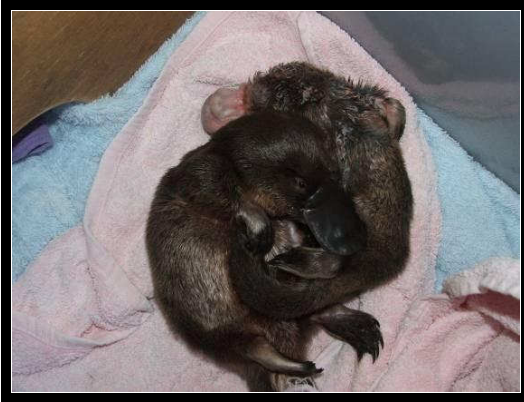
(Trey)



(Zeke)

One of the most interesting things I discovered with all three of them when they came into care was they all required heat. Everything you read about raising platypus is that they are like echidnas and like to be kept below 25° but they all sought out and slept directly on the heat pad for the first few days in care, with Trey using it for two weeks until the arrival of Finn when he chose to sleep on him.

I believe this is not a normal behaviour but like echidnas when they are ill or recovering from injury's they prefer a heat source. I continued to provide heat until they had clearly stopped using it.



(Trey and Finn)



(Finn and Trey)

Trey and Finn were introduced after Finn had been in care for one week and had made a marked recovery. Finn was placed on one side of the enclosure with Trey sleeping on the other within an hour they were curled up together, and from then on did everything in sequence and always slept touching or laying on each other, even when they entered the water they kept in close contact with each other.

Zeke being older did not bond with the other two and was housed separately.

All three were on antibiotics for the first couple of weeks in care these were given both orally and injectable, Zeke and Trey for their exudative dermatitis both had different strains of bacteria and Finn as a precaution due to his low PCV and high number of bacteria in his faecal sample.

On the tenth day together both were awake and very active in their enclosure, Trey began trying to climb the walls. I filled a small tub with water warmed to 30° placed a folded towel at one end, added some meal worms, earthworms and very tiny fresh water crayfish along with some fly pupae.

I then placed both Trey and Finn on the towel, both went into the water immediately and proceeded to play and chase each other in the water; they actively searched and played with the food but neither made any attempt to eat for another ten days when Finn consumed his first solids and Trey followed three days later.



They were placed permanently in their outside pool and enclosure one week later. They were offered a variety of food each day which included, Fly pupae about 20gm, earthworms 40gm, mealworms 50gm, large mealworms 20 yabbies or freshwater crayfish in the beginning only small ones were offered and they ate around ten each after about three weeks they were consuming over 100 each so I gave them a variety of sizes, they would consume between 20 and 135 per night each.

Tadpoles, goldfish, black worms, crickets, water bugs, tiny trout and shrimp were also included. All food items except the crayfish were eaten in various quantities each day, for example one day they would consume huge amounts of mealworms and the next not touch them but eat a large amount of earth worms, crayfish were eaten everyday.



Although Finn was the smallest of the three at just over 200gms he was the first to do everything and also consumed the largest volume of food, his waking hours were spent eating and he would often consume 2/3 of his body weight each day.

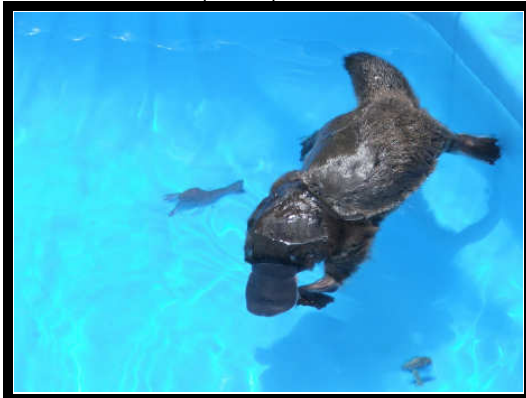
Although initially able to be toileted after each feed Trey and Finn quickly became adjusted to passing both faeces and urine in the pool, they spent a large amount of time grooming each day both in the water and back in their enclosure.

Faecal consistency changed as they got older and varied with what food item had been their favourite that day but was usually black and similar to Echidnas.

Pool size altered as they grew bigger and were swimming more. Zeke went into a large pool straight away, Trey and Finn went from a small wading pool to a larger pool and finally to a very large pool. Water was changed daily, with all environmental enrichment such as logs, rocks and plants cleaned daily as well. Outdoor burrow enclosures had bedding and ice packs replaced daily and the enclosure exchanged every third day to enable the old one to be cleaned.

I spent hours and hours both during the day and night watching them in the water and their capacity for play is enormous from wrestling with each other, darting in and out of hollow logs, games of chase me, and playing with debris, palm fronds and the crayfish their energy use is enormous. As a test one day I weighed them before entering the water then again after two hours when none had consumed any of the food placed in the pool, as they were too busy having fun; all had dropped nearly forty grams.

(Zeke)



(Finn and Trey)



Zeke was released back to Goondiwindi four weeks after he came into care, his dermatitis had healed he was 300gms heavier than when he arrived, and was very ready to return to the wild. As an older juvenile Zeke was very independent when he came into care, so after the first few critical days he was handled as little as possible.

His personality was very strong and he had no interest in Trey and Finn. He was also very nocturnal unlike the other two.

Finn the most active little platypus with the most ferocious appetite died after 12 weeks in care, he had no change in his demeanour nor his appetite, death was acute, on necropsy everything appeared normal; samples including brain were sent for culture and the cause of death was diagnosed as viral encephalitis.

Trey initially the most critical and the one requiring the most intense care, is now a fit healthy very fat little platypus awaiting a final assessment and release.

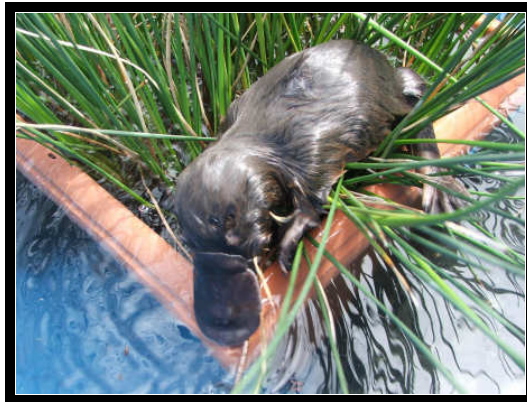
(Zeke)



(Trey and Finn)



(Finn)



Having this opportunity has been one of the greatest highlights in my life and one I will never forget, I have appreciated every second of the time I had with them.

(Full Platypus notes will be finished in early 2008)
