



## **ANZAAS – Victorian Division**

Australia and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science

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Friday 8 February 2008

### **NEWS RELEASE**

#### **Free public lecture:**

#### **“Platypus ecology in the Melbourne area .”**

THE Victorian Division of the Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science (ANZAAS) will launch its 2008 public talks series - Melbourne talks SCIENCE - with a free talk entitled "*Platypus ecology in the Melbourne area*" in the Casey Plaza Theatre at RMIT University, Melbourne, on Wednesday 20 February at 8pm.

To be delivered by Mr Geoff Williams and Dr Melody Serena of the Australian Platypus Conservancy in Wiseleigh, 298 kilometres east of Melbourne (near Bairnsdale in Victoria), it will be the first of 10 monthly free talks staged by ANZAAS with the support of RMIT University in Melbourne this year.

"The platypus has long been regarded as one of the world's strangest animals," Mr Williams said.

"It is a mammal but, like a reptile, lays eggs and produces venom. The animal's unique bill also contains hundreds of electrical receptors which it uses to locate its food."

Dr Serena said that while many people thought this supposedly shy and sensitive creature was found only in pristine rivers, far from big cities, it could actually inhabit a range of water bodies in close proximity to humans.

"The Australian Platypus Conservancy, together with Melbourne Water, has since 1995 undertaken studies to map where platypus occur in the metropolitan area and learn more about the species' ecology in urbanised habitats," Dr Serena said.

"These have shown water quality and toxic contaminants in bottom sediment to be just two aspects of platypus habitat influencing the survival of Melbourne's platypus populations."

Dr Serena said better understanding of the animal's remarkable mobility (which has seen some individuals make journeys of more than 50 kilometres) and its unexpectedly long lifespan is providing some insight into how the species might respond to drought, flood and longer-term climate change.

ANZAAS, Victorian Division chairman Dr Peter Kemeny said the talk would appeal to people of all ages, whether they be serious students of biology or just enjoy exploring Melbourne's parks and waterways.

<http://www.anzaas.org.au/vic>

#### **MEDIA CONTACTS** (not for publication):

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