

# A Living Breathing Hoax

A while ago, I decided to write a series within my blog about animals, my favorite things. I just can't find enough time to learn about animals, and I love sharing knowledge about their incredible attributes. Here is chapter two in my Interesting Animals series. To read chapter one about a scaly mammal called the pangolin, [click here](#).

For chapter two, I chose to focus on the duck-billed platypus; an animal who is so strange looking that people thought it to be a hoax when it was first discovered in 1798.

The platypus is one of 3-5 species (depending on the source – animal knowledge is very differential) of monotremes or egg-laying mammals. I know, at one point we were all taught that one of the characteristics of mammals is that they give birth to live young, but that is not the case. Monotremes lay eggs, and the platypus join echidnas (spiny anteaters) in this animal order. The platypus is found in Australia – seems like they have all the cool animals, doesn't it? I just wish they weren't so stingy with their animals. I know they stopped loaning out the Tasmanian Devil years ago, and now that the last one died (it resided in Fort Wayne Indiana until its death – I could kick myself for not making the less than hour trip over there to see it while it was alive), the only place to see them is in Australia. The same goes for the platypus. I've visited many zoos, and I've never seen a live platypus. A quick check on the internet reveals that they are only found in Australian zoos.

But anyway, aside from being an aquatic (with water-repellent fur), egg-laying mammal, another cool thing about the platypus is that the males are actually poisonous. Both genders have a spur on their left foot, but the males' spur produces enough venom to really hurt a human being. Here is a picture of the duck-billed platypus – note the soft, leathery duck-bill which

is actually used by the animal to sense the electric fields caused by its moving prey (feeds on shrimp, fish eggs, small fish, and aquatic invertebrates found in streams and lakes).



Easy to see how this duck-billed, beaver-tailed, otter-footed, egg-laying mammal was once thought to be an elaborate man-made fraud, huh?

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## Unforseen Side Effect Of Hurricanes

With all the storm activity in the Atlantic Ocean lately, I've been especially interested in hurricanes. I've lived a lot of

places, but since I've only resided in the midwest, I've never witnessed a hurricane firsthand. Well, that's not entirely true. There was a hurricane a couple of years ago (I forgot its name unfortunately) that ventured up to our corner of Ohio. By the time it got here, it had been over land for quite some time which had reduced it to nothing but rain, lots of rain. It was really no different than any other rain we've gotten, except that I had been watching the radar, and I knew that it had been a hurricane in a past life – that made it special to me; I really enjoyed it.

Anyway, last night, the baby decided to wake up right as we were going to bed, so I was stuck watching tv while I fed him. And it's strange, because I really used to enjoy tv, but that's changed for me recently. Maybe it's because we are so busy all the time so I got used to not watching tv... I don't know what it is. All I know is that I used to be the kind of person who could be happy watching anything on tv – I could find something that would entertain me at any time of the day or night. Not so much anymore. I still like tv, and I love watching my favorite shows (like The Office – almost time for new episodes!!!), but “junk tv” as I call it (reality shows, documentaries, etc.) isn't so appealing anymore. My point in detailing all of this is to explain how interesting I found some random documentary I caught last night on the History Channel while I was feeding my son.

The documentary was about giant snakes, specifically pythons, and how they are starting to become a threat to people in Florida. What I found most fascinating about this is the fact that these snakes are not indigenous to the United States, but in 1992, when Hurricane Andrew hit Florida, many pet stores and homes that had kept these animals as pets were destroyed. Baby pythons were released into the wild and because of Florida's tropical climate, especially in the Everglades, these animals now have a wild population that is thriving. On the show, they had pictures of one snake that

had swallowed an adult human whole. They weren't sure if the pictures were real or a hoax, and unfortunately I never found out because my son let me go to bed before the show was over. They also had pictures of a snake that had swallowed a 6-foot-long alligator whole, but it had ruptured the snake, causing his death. In the words of a snake expert on the show, "snakes can digest anything" – it's just that the alligator probably clawed the snake open. But you could see the outline of the alligator in the snake – it looked like an alligator colored like a snake – it was bizarre.

I may have to find this documentary again so I can watch it when I'm not half asleep. But it's really interesting to me that because of a hurricane, Florida now has another fearsome reptile lurking in the Everglades. I'm sure that was the last thing on people's minds after Hurricane Andrew wreaked its havoc 16 years ago – I bet this scenario didn't cross anyone's mind. Who knows what unforeseen side effects we'll see from Hurricane Katrina in a couple of decades? One can only imagine...