Tasmanian Platypuses are under threat from a deadly infection caused by an aquatic fungus, *Mucor amphibiorum*.

Photographs by:
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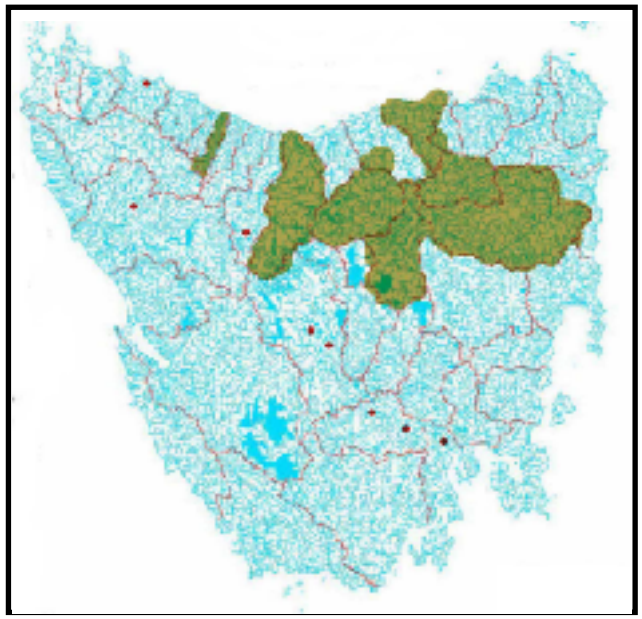
Affected animals develop single or multiple ulcers on various parts of their bodies. The fungal ulcer invades deeply into underlying tissues causing loss of body fluids, secondary infections and loss of body temperature regulation. Mobility can also be severely affected resulting in slow starvation.

The disease was first observed in 1982 when several infected animals were retrieved from the Elizabeth River at Campbelltown.

In 1991 more infected animals were collected from the South Esk and Meander Rivers and from Brumby's Creek at Cressy.



river catchments with numerous platypuses with *Mucor* ulcers confirmed

locations where platypus with ulcers reported

Joanne Connolly carried out research on the disease in 1994. Assisted by information gathered from the public, she mapped the extent of the disease which appeared to be confined to the Tamar River catchment. Since then there have been a number of anecdotal sightings on other river systems and there is a fear the disease may be spreading. **Platypus Alert** is seeking sightings of ulcerated platypuses for the purpose of follow-up investigations.

The Platypus (*Ornithorhynchus anatinus*) **is one of Australia's most distinctive animals. It and the echidna are monotremes; egg laying mammals that suckle their young. Platypuses are found only in the eastern part of Australia where they live in burrows in the banks of lakes, rivers and streams.**

They have a streamlined, fur-covered waterproof body, strongly webbed front feet and the characteristic duck-like bill. Males grow larger than females and have a venomous spur on the inside of each ankle capable of delivering a very painful wound.

Platypuses can spend up to 18 hours a day feeding. They catch a variety of mainly invertebrates under water and come to the surface to breathe and chew their food. They dive when alarmed and will often retreat to thick vegetation or their burrows. They also rest and raise their young in burrows which have entrances just above the water level often concealed by vegetation.

Platypuses are considered common but vulnerable as they are susceptible to habitat degradation and deteriorating water quality. Poor water quality can affect their health as well as have an impact on their food source. They are frequently run over when crossing roads, killed by dogs or drowned in eel traps. Occasionally they are caught on fishing lines or become tangled in nets. Extreme caution should be taken when disentangling animals, especially males; when absolutely necessary, platypuses are best handled by holding them in a secure grip at the base of their tail.