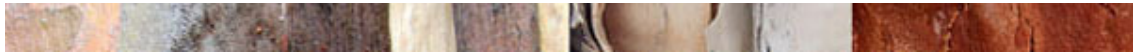


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# Oxford Word of the Month – November: platypup

*noun*: a baby platypus.

## THE STORY BEHIND THE WORD OF THE MONTH

There is some discussion on the Internet about the correct name for a baby platypus. Some commentators note that a baby platypus may be called a *puggle*, while others say that *puggle* refers only to a baby echidna. The following writer has an alternative:

*A common misconception is that a baby platypus is called a puggle. There is no actual official name for a baby platypus, but a common suggested name is 'platypup'. (Sunshine Coast Sunday, 13 January 2013)*

The word **platypup** has received some interest in recent years, including the establishment of a Facebook page to campaign for its official acceptance: 'Platypup: Give the baby platypus a name'.

**Platypup** has a long but interrupted history. The earliest evidence appears in the 1940s and refers to the first platypus bred in captivity, in a Victorian wildlife sanctuary:

*A platypup's birth made history ... For more than two months Fleahy restrained his longing to take a peep at the platypup. Then, last Monday, he dug down to the blind end of the burrow, found the nest and brought the youngster up for a quick inspection. (Sydney Sun, 9 January 1944)*

A year later the same baby platypus is mentioned in several newspaper items:

*Platy-Pup Is One Year Old ... Corrie, the first platypus to be bred in captivity, is one year old. (Brisbane Courier-Mail, 25 January 1945)*

*The 'Sun' called the first baby platypus to be bred in captivity a platy-pup . But what's wrong with a 'platy-kitten'? (Melbourne Advocate, 13 January 1945)*

Following these references to Corrie the platypup there is almost no evidence for the term until the 2000s. Most of the recent evidence is found online in the context of discussion about the correct name for platypus young. Platypup also appears in a series of children’s fantasy books, which may indicate an increasing awareness and use of the term—except that the authors are American:

*After one final yawn, Pippi wandered into the kitchen, grabbed a crayfish tail, and called, ‘Mom! Dad! I’m going outside!’ ‘Don’t go too far,’ came her father’s sleepy voice. ‘You’re still a platypup.’ ‘Okay!’ she called back, as she headed for the burrow entrance. (Trevor Pryce, Joel Naftali, and Sanford Greene, *The Rainbow Serpent*, 2015)*

Despite talk of ‘correct’ and ‘official’ naming, it is the continued usage of a word, and its acceptance by a wider audience, that cements its place in our vocabulary. At present *puggle* (which emerged in the 1990s, transferred from the proprietary name of a range of soft toys) has the edge over *platypup*. The echidna and the platypus, as the world’s only egg-laying mammals, are closely related. *Puggle* is already established as the name for a baby echidna, so it is not surprising to find increasing evidence of *puggle* used as a name for the young of both animals.

It is possible that *platypup* and *puggle* may coexist for a while as synonyms, until one establishes itself as the preferred term. *Puggle* may have the advantage.

*Platypup* is being considered for inclusion in the next edition of the *Australian National Dictionary*.



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