

would realise my hope of taking it to Europe; but three days before my departure from l'île de France, I found it dead in my cabin...

Garnot thought the cause of death was the echidna eating the arsenical soap he kept for preserving animal skins. As it happens, the echidna would probably not have made it back to Europe as the ship was wrecked off the Cape of Good Hope, and while no lives were lost, all Garnot's specimens were lost.

Subsequent observations on echidnas and hibernation

In 1846, Professor George Waterhouse, who had written the mammal section of the zoology of the Voyage of the Beagle,³⁹ reported in his *Natural History of the Mammalia* some observations by the naturalists Quoy and Gaimard from their 1826 expedition with Dumont d'Urville.

[Messrs Quoy and Gaimard] procured a specimen of an Echidna (the *E setosa*) at Van Diemen's Land, which they kept alive for some time. They describe it as an apathetic and stupid animal; and state, that for the first month after its capture it took no sustenance whatever, but at the end of that time it began to lap, and finally, to eat some food prepared for it, consisting of a mixture of flour, water, and sugar.

This unsympathetic text is accompanied by an equally unsympathetic illustration (Figure 4.3) showing a very reptilian echidna.

Gerard Krefft in his *Mammals of Australia* published in 1871, speculated on the possibility of echidna hibernation, as well as describing some experiments that would not now be approved by animal ethics committees.

Even now we are as ignorant as possible about the habits and economy of this well-known animal, and we cannot tell what becomes of our spiny friends in summer-time. A keen observer, Mr Charles Keper, of Soldier's Point, Port Stephens, who always supplies us with Echidnas in winter, is of the opinion that these animals retire into the ground,—in fact, hibernate during the hot season.⁴⁰

The Echidna will live for months in captivity without taking food; and Mr Keper's suggestion that the animal feeds in winter only, and hibernates during summer, is by no means improbable. It is difficult to drown one, and from eight to ten minutes at least are necessary for the experiment. The animal is tolerably snake-proof,



Figure 4.2 Echidna from Lesson's 1830 volume on the voyage of la Coquille.⁴⁹ This was not the echidna bought by M Garnot in Sydney. Lesson and Garnot note in the 1826 account of the voyage: 'We collected three individuals: one was used to make a skeleton for the laboratory of the Museum and the two others were given to us by General Brisbane for M Cuvier.'⁵⁰ (Allport Library and Museum of Fine Arts, State Library of Tasmania.)