

One Echidna *by Lorraine McLoughlin 13 May 2018*

The echidna, brown spikes spruiking from orange body, hides in the mulch and disappears its pointy head in tawny leaves. The echidna is only one I think, but he moves quickly, surely it's him again. The echidna seems small, perhaps a youngster, but as he's only one, there is no sibling or parent with which to compare, and I'm not asking him inside to measure against height marks behind the door.

This echidna might even have a mate, but where, and how do they do it if he has – a quick poke against a sharp response? Anyhow for now he's still – he heard the muse of running water in the creek and sexual desire waned, if he had any, and he moved to take a drink. Many a sexual overture is doused by alcohol, though fuelled at first, the urge is dampened. But my little echidna just drinks.

And then he's gone and with it his absence dispels any illusion of paradise, the delight in nature's creation. I wander off, bereft to other parts of the garden. And there he is. My one echidna by the birdbath tricks me to believe again in bucolic bliss. My echidna, who still doesn't know how I burst with unrequited love, forages, burrows and probably slurps ants with his clever tongue, without thoughts of sex to trouble him.

I circle my garden, then return. My one echidna has gone. Round and round I search. To be, or not to be...where is he now? Spikes of disappointment cloud my horizons; dammit my echidna won't play by the book. And then I wander lonely as a cloud towards the field, without daffodils, just disconsolate thoughts.

I must have fallen down into Alice's wonderland as spines of brown trot on tiny legs and plump down nearby on the grass. Can I call the Mad Hatter or others to join my party or will I frighten away this dear one and only echidna. I think not. I'll harbour him for myself, watch him all day. As afternoon turns to evening, I'll be there for him, if only he'll stay.