Echidna Shuffle

Designer: Kris Gould
Publisher: Wattsalpoag
2-6 players  15 minutes  ages 6+
MSRP $30

Written by: Stephen Conway
THE CONCEPT

Echidnas, prickly cousins to the platypus, love to roam the forest floor. They often bump into friends along the way as they walk their well worn paths. What the echidnas don’t know is this. The insects of the forest ride them everywhere… like the bus or the subway! Better yet, echidnas are like spiny unaware Uber or Lyft drivers, picking up and dropping off passengers as they shuffle along.

In Echidna Shuffle, each player has three colorful insects they are trying to get home. Can you catch a ride on an echidna and help it shuffle through the forest to your home stumps? The problem is there are so many echidnas around, they often wander off course, especially when you get close to your bug’s home!

THE COMPONENTS

Echidna Shuffle can easily make a case for being the cutest game in the universe. One look at the ridiculously adorable echidna figurines and you’ll be smiling. You will want to hold them. And talk to them. And play with them like a long lost pet. OK… maybe that’s just me. But I don’t think so! They are irresistibly cute.

There are also lovely stumps and insect figurines in bright colors: butterflies and ladybugs, ants and bees, grasshoppers and beetles - a group for each player, plus a matching bug token and pickup marker.
The game board is big and bright and two sided, each one displaying a different layout of forest paths. There are big arrows indicating the directions of the paths.
Last but not least there is a number board and a custom echidna die. It is a 6-sided die, but it is numbered from 2-7 with tiny echinda feet as its pips.

![Echidna die](image)

To begin, each player will select a pickup space. This is where all your bugs will catch a ride from the echidnas. The player to your left will get to decide where to place your three stumps. This means your stumps will most likely be annoyingly far away from where your bugs catch a ride.

**THE MECHANICS**

Echidna Shuffle is a dice-driven pick-up-and-deliver game. It’s a race between you and your fellow players to see who can get all their bugs delivered safely to their home stumps on the board.

Directly and indirectly, the echidna die drives each turn. On your first turn, you roll the die and based on that roll, you place a matching token on that number on your number board.

Then you get to move the echidnas a number of spaces equal to the number you rolled. You can move any echidna on the board. You can even move multiple echidnas. No one owns them. So any of the little critters are fair game.
If you land an echidna on your pickup marker, then one of your bugs catches a ride! Place it on the echidna’s back. The two pieces connect together beautifully.

But here’s the catch.

There are a LOT of echidnas and only a few open spaces along the forest path! In order to move an echidna, you must follow the arrows along the path AND the echidna must have an open space on which to land.

Echidnas won’t jump over or land on occupied spaces.

If this cardboard forest has a golden rule it’s this: if there’s an echidna in your way, you must shuffle it along to another space.

Thus begins your struggle to keep the flow of echidna traffic moving! In order to move the one echidna you really want to move, you may need to move several others on the board to clear a path.
WHAT SETS THIS GAME APART

Balance, reluctant kindness and temptation to mischief set Echidna Shuffle apart.

Balance comes in the form of the number board. The echidna die is numbered 2-7. Over the course of two turns you will get to move echidnas a total of 9 spaces, guaranteed. If your first roll is a 7, you mark this with a token on your number board. On your next turn you do not roll the die. Instead, you move the number token down along the arrow to the space with the 2. This means you get to move the echidnas two spaces as though you rolled a 2 this turn. If I roll a 5 on my first turn, I know my next turn I will move 4. A 3 first? Then a 6 next time.

This brings balance to the game since you will never have to worry about always rolling low. A low roll one turn guarantees your next “virtual” roll courtesy of the number board will be high.

Reluctant kindness and temptation to mischief are always present on every turn in Echidna Shuffle.

Reluctant kindness comes in the form of moving an echidna with someone else’s bug. It could even mean delivering another player’s bug to one of their home stumps! The board is so tight with traffic that sometimes the only way to help yourself is to help someone else, too!
Temptation to mischief is rooted in the same dilemma. When the echidnas are blocking your best path and you don’t have enough moves to get them out of the way, the temptation is always there to move echidnas with other player’s bugs along a path that might make it harder for them to get home. Sometimes the only way to help yourself is to mess someone else up!

This decision point - to be kind and/or mischievous is there every turn. And each time the cute little creatures move some people will cheer while others will moan. This keeps everyone engaged and part of the game.
On the great board game Venn diagram in sky (it’s a thing, trust me) Echidna Shuffle sits at the intersection of beauty, balance, interaction and simple strategy. Each of these elements provides its own invitation to play.

Beauty in the wonderfully charming pieces.

Balance in the number board equalizing high and low die rolls

Interaction in the fact you will most likely help or cause mischief for other players each time you take a turn

Simple strategy in the surprising level of planning and forethought available to every player.

You can accept any of these invitations. Or all of them. And they all lead to different kinds of fun.

All this in a game clearly geared toward very young players. This is a game for children that can operate on many levels at once.

The kids can fall in love with the beauty and the interaction. The balance and planning may be lost on them, while the parents or older friends or siblings can find fun there too.

There are even variants to explore and plenty of ways you could nudge the game to suit the needs of your group.

Echidna Shuffle is delightful and charming. It is most definitely Major Fun and a great example of what a modern game for kids can and should be.

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