

# 18. FURTHER RECORDS OF *PYXIDEA MOUHOTII* (GRAY) FROM THE NORTH BANK OF R. BRAHMAPUTRA, ASSAM

The keeled box turtle *Pyxidea mouhotii* (Gray, 1862) is known from many localities of north-eastern India (Bhupathy and Choudhury 1992, Choudhury 1993, 1996a,b, 1998). Barring one (Drupong Reserve Forest), all the recorded sites were on the south bank of the river. The recorded localities were North Cachar Hills and Karbi Anglong (Choudhury 1993) of Assam, Khasi and Garo Hills of Meghalaya, Namdapha National Park and Mehao Wildlife Sanctuary in Arunachal Pradesh (Bhupathy and Choudhury 1992), Tamenglong district, Manipur (Choudhury 1996b), Hailakandi district in southern Assam, near the Assam-Mizoram interstate boundary (Choudhury 1998), and Drupong Reserve Forest, Papum Pare district, Arunachal Pradesh (Choudhury 1996a). The record from Drupong is the only one from the north bank of the Brahmaputra river. Outside India, the species has been recorded in Indochina from Myanmar to Vietnam and also Hainan in China (Stubbs 1991).

I report two recent records from the north bank of the Brahmaputra river. On July 22, 1998, a live turtle was caught by the forest staff near Potasali in Balipara Reserve Forest (26° 55' N, 92° 50' E), Sonitpur district, central Assam. The turtle was caught from the forest floor of the evergreen jungle, not far from the banks of the Jia-Bhoreli river, which forms the boundary of Nameri National Park. The terrain was flat, and the elevation c. 100 m above msl. I examined the specimen and then released it in Nameri National Park on July 31, 1998. It measured (in cm): straight line carapace length (SCL) 12.0; curved carapace length (CCL) 14.0; straight line

carapace width (SCW) 9.5; curved carapace width (CCW) 13.5 and shell height c. 5.0; plastron length – greatest (PL-gt) 12.4; plastron length – notch to notch (PL-nn) 11.8; plastron width 7.5. Weight 200 gm.

On July 31, 1998, I obtained a carapace with plastron of the same species from a roadside hotel at Sessa in West Kameng district, Arunachal Pradesh. It was collected live near Sessa (27° 07' N, 92° 33' E) in Sessa Orchid Sanctuary in May-June 1998 and its flesh eaten. It was in the vicinity of wild banana trees near Sessa Nullah, but not near the water. The elevation of the place is about 1,000 m above msl, the maximum elevation record for the keeled box turtle in India so far. Measurements (in cm): SCL = 16.0 cm; CCL = 17.5; SCW = 11.6; CCW = 16.5; CH = c. 4.7; PL-gt = 14.3; PL-nn = 13.3; PW = 8.7. The plastron was conspicuously concave, indicating that it was a male.

The habitat in Sessa at around 1,000 m elevation is mostly tropical wet evergreen rainforest type, and the terrain mountainous, being part of the Eastern Himalaya. These records also extend the range of the species on the north bank by about 120 km westwards.

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## 19. DISTRIBUTIONAL NOTES ON THE TURTLES OF WESTERN MYANMAR

At least 22 species of tortoises and freshwater turtles inhabit Myanmar, including six which are endemic (Iverson 1992, van Dijk 1997, Platt *et al.* 2000). However, the chelonian fauna of Myanmar is one of the least known in Asia (McCord 1997), and old fragmentary observations remain the principal source of information (Kuchling 1995, van Dijk 1997, Platt *et al.* 2000). Basic studies have not been undertaken and most distribution records originated prior to 1900 (van Dijk 1997). Species inventories of particular regions are essential for conservation, and acquiring baseline data on the occurrence even of common species is important (Dodd and Franz 1993, Oliver and Beattie 1993). We report recent distribution records of turtles in western Myanmar and discuss the significance of our findings.

Data on the occurrence of turtles in western Myanmar were gathered in conjunction with a tortoise survey of Shwe Settaw Wildlife Sanctuary (SSWS), conducted from August 3-24, 1999 (Platt 1999). SSWS (20° 11' N, 94° 28' E) was established in 1940 to protect Eld's deer (*Cervus eldi thamin*) (Salter and Sayer 1986). It is located on the western edge of the central dry zone within the rain shadow of the Arakan Yoma Mountains (FAO/UNDP 1982). Consequently, mean annual rainfall is low (*c.* 90 cm) with an extended dry season from December through May. Except for major rivers, there are no permanent streams, and available surface water is extremely limited during much of the year (FAO/UNDP 1982).

The dry zone is characterized by deciduous

forest, locally known as *Indaing*, and dominated by fire-resistant trees such as *Dipterocarpus tuberculatus*, *Shorea oblongifolia*, *Pentacme siamensis* and *Tectona hamiltoniana*. Canopy height rarely exceeds 6 m, and the understorey consists of low shrubs and grass. Dense vegetation and stands of bamboo occur along ephemeral watercourses (FAO/UNDP 1982; Salter and Sayer 1986). Anthropogenic fires are common during the dry season (FAO/UNDP 1982; van Dijk 1994).

We interviewed SSWS personnel, villagers, hunters and turtle traders in the villages surrounding the sanctuary to obtain data on the turtle fauna of our study area. Local residents are generally an excellent source of information and shells are often sold to buyers who periodically visit the villages (Thirakhupt and van Dijk 1994). We measured carapace (CL) and plastron length (PL), and photographed available specimens. Voucher photographs were deposited in the Campbell Museum (CUSC), Clemson University, Clemson, South Carolina, USA. Taxonomy follows Ernst and Barbour (1989).

### *Cyclemys* spp.

Three *Cyclemys* spp. were examined; two living turtles (CUSC 1797; CL = 19.4 cm, CUSC 1798; CL = 19.5 cm) and a carapace (CUSC 1770; CL = 20.4 cm). The specific identity of these specimens is not possible. *Cyclemys dentata* was reported from Myanmar (Iverson 1992). However, in a recent revision of the





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