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A FRESH-WATER TURTLE (*Pelochelys cantoris*, Gray,)
FROM NEW GUINEA.

By EDGAR R. WAITE, F.L.S., Zoologist.

(Fig. 4.)

By the kindness and forethought of the Hon. Anthony Musgrave, C.M.G., Government Secretary of British New Guinea, our knowledge of the distribution of the fresh-water turtles (Trionychoidea) has been considerably extended. This gentleman forwarded to the Trustees a large example accompanied by the following particulars:—"The fresh-water Tortoise was brought to the camp of a road-making party, on the third of September, by some natives, who had speared it in the Laloki River, one of the outfalls of the Astrolabe Range, forty miles from its entry into Redscar Bay. I reached the camp myself late on the following day and was shown the tortoise alive and active, in the small pool of a creek flowing into the above river. It seemed to me of interest to science, and I proposed to send it alive to Sydney and had it brought to Port Moresby, but it died on the tenth September of wounds, the carapace showing three or four punctures with a hunting spear. Mr. A. C. English kindly preserved the skin. The tortoise being a gravid female, I superintended the preservation of all the contents of the ovary. All the fleshy parts of the body were readily received by the natives for food. I may mention that Mr. John MacDonald, Head Gaoler for British New Guinea, first drew my attention to the tortoise. It seems to be little known to the natives, or it may be that they seldom attain such large size, as the river whence it was taken is frequented also by a large-sized species of crocodile."

When received at the Museum it was seen that, though the external parts were in good condition, the cervical, pelvic, caudal and limb bones had been removed; the skull had fortunately been preserved. I am thus definitely able to identify the turtle as of the genus Pelochelys, Gray,1 and I do not see sufficient grounds for regarding it as distinct from the only admitted species, P. cantoris, Gray. It is recorded from India, Burma, Malaysia, Borneo, the Philippines and South-east China (P. poliakowii, Strauch2), and, as before mentioned, it is now added to the fauna of New Guinea.

1 Gray—Proc. Zool. Soc., 1864, p. 89.

2 Strauch—Mém. Acad. Imp. Sci. St. Pétersb., (7), xxxviii., 1890, p. 118, pl. iv., figs. 1-3.

From a geographical aspect, this record is of particular interest. When "Wallace's Line," separating the Oriental from the Austro-Malayan Region, was first traced, little was known of the Zoology of the Moluccas or New Guinea. Since then workers on particular groups have frequently announced that the limits of Wallace's Line did not harmonise with the results of their studies. An excellent summary of this subject has been published by Meyer and Wigglesworth.<sup>3</sup>

To the transgressors of this celebrated boundary, *Pelochelys*, hitherto known only from the Asiatic side of the "line," is now added. If the New Guinea fauna be regarded as balancing between the Oriental and Australian affinities, the present addition will help to weight the Oriental scale.

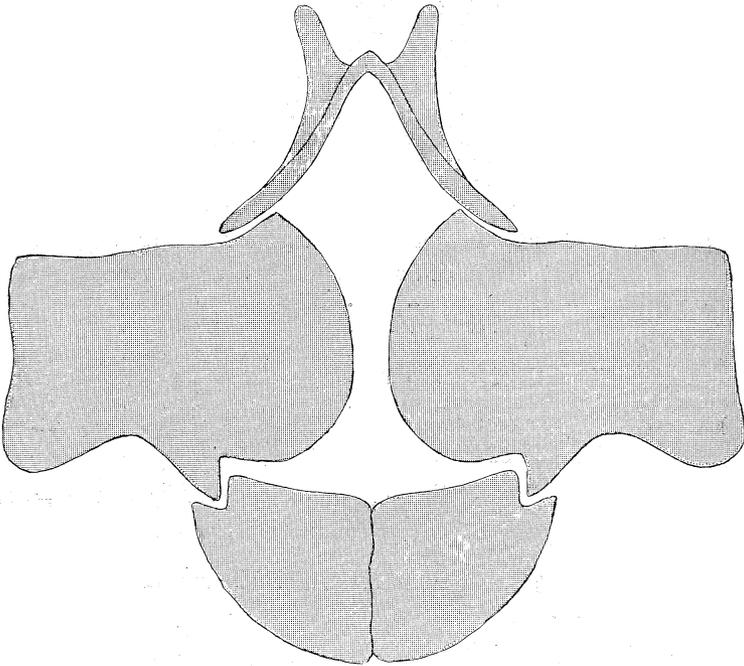


FIG. 4.

The accompanying illustration of the plastron renders the appearance in "the flesh," removal of the soft parts not being practicable. The callosities on the hyo-hypo-and xiphi-plastra are, however, so largely developed as to almost conceal the underlying structures.

<sup>3</sup> Meyer & Wigglesworth—Birds of Celebes, i., 1898, pp. 80-89.

The sculpturing of each hyo-and hypo-plastron together forms a regular concentric series but each xiphiplastron has its own concentric ornamentation.

Three genera of the Trionychyda, namely:—*Cycloderma*, Peters, *Emyda*, Gray, and *Cyclanorbis*, Gray, are separated from the other three: namely:—*Trionyx*, Geoffroy, *Pelochelys*, Gray, and *Chitra*, Gray, by the presence of a pair of posterior cutaneous flaps, under which the hind limbs may be concealed. *Pelochelys* has an anterior flap, forming a complete bow, beneath which the head and anterior limbs may be concealed. I am unable to examine this condition in examples of the other genera and we do not possess further specimens of *Pelochelys*.

Of the carapace, the first four neural shields have the postero-lateral sides shortest, the last four have these sides longest. A similar condition is figured by Günther and Strauch. If wide enough, the outer extremities of the nuchal plate would possibly overlie the second dorsal rib. The notched ends are simply embedded in the fleshy tissue.

On the lower surface of each hind foot a flat tubercle may be noted; it lies to the outer edge of the mid-line and is truncate anteriorly, but shelving behind. Its breadth is 18 mm.

Mr. Musgrave informs us that the weight of the Turtle, when alive, was 68 lbs. The principal measurements are:—

Total length of back	...	650 mm.
„ breadth „	... ..	520 „
Length of carapace	... ..	420 „
Breadth „	... ..	425 „
Length of Plastron	... ..	420 „
Breadth „	... ..	500 „
„ Bridge	... ..	165 „
Length of Skull	... ..	180 „
Breadth „	... ..	108 „

The ovaries contain eggs in all stages of development while the uteri held twenty-seven completely shelled eggs. These are almost spherical, the dimensions averaging 34.5 x 33.3 mm., and the weight 30.9 grammes. The shells are white and perfectly smooth.