

FAMILY I. CHERSITES. *Dumeril et Bibron.*

CHARACTERS.

1. The body is short, oval, convex, and protected above by a shell or carapace, covered with plates, of which there are thirteen dorsal, never imbricated, and from twenty-three to twenty-five marginal. Under this carapace the animal can retract the head, neck, extremities and tail.
2. There is a bony sternum or plastron below, which is most commonly covered with twelve plates, sometimes with eleven only.
3. In some the anterior part of the sternum is movable; (Pyxis, Bell;) in others the posterior; (Chersus, Wagler;) and in others again both anterior and posterior sections are movable; (Cistuda.)
4. The head in all is small, short, and quadrilateral.
5. The nostrils are anterior, closely approximated, and just above the median border of the horny covering of the upper jaw.
6. The eyes are lateral, and are always nearer the snout than the occiput. They are small, with the lids opening obliquely, so that the anterior canthus is on a plane with the nostrils, while the posterior is much more elevated. The inferior lid is most movable.
7. The membrane of the tympanum is always apparent, circular and large.

8. The mouth is small, with the horny or cutting margin of the jaws often serrated.
9. The tongue is thick and papillated, and fills the concavity of the lower jaw.
10. There are never barbels at the chin, or cutaneous appendages at the neck.
11. The extremities are of equal length; the hand is confounded with the forearm, having only a slight fold at the carpus; the fingers are not in general distinct, but are united in a mass and covered by a thick skin. With one exception, all have five nails, which correspond with the phalanges. The posterior extremities are clavate, and often resemble much the legs and feet of the elephant, and have four nails.
12. The tail is short and conical.
13. The eggs are round, and have a hard shell.

Of Chersites, only two genera inhabit the United States, *Testudo* and *Cistuda*; which last genus I have thought best to unite with this family, because it is really a land animal and agrees perfectly with that tribe in its habits. In some parts of its organization, however, as in the extremities, the genus *Cistuda* approaches that of *Emys* so much, that it may fairly be considered a connecting link between the land and fresh-water forms of Tortoises; yet it stands much better at the termination of the Chersites, than at the head of the *Emydæ*. Its proper place I consider to be after the genus *Pyxis*, of Bell; which is the beginning of the transition. In this the anterior portion only of the sternum is movable; and here for the first time is seen in the extremities "an approach to the palmated conformation of the *Emydæ*, and the claws are observed to assume somewhat of the length and sharpness that characterize the fresh-water family." In *Cistuda*, both valves of the sternum are movable, and the extremities still more depressed.



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