



Emys terrapin.

EMYS TERRAPIN.—*Schoepff*.

Plate XII.

CHARACTERS. Shell oval, nearly entire, slightly emarginate posteriorly; depressed; obtusely carinate; dusky olive-green, or dark brown, and marked with darker concentric lines.

SYNONYMES. *Testudo terrapin*, *Schoepff*, Hist. Test., p. 64, tab. 15.

La Terrapène, *Lacépède*, Quad. Ovip., tom. i. p. 129.

Testudo centrata, *Latreille*, Hist. des Rep., tom. i. p. 145.

Testudo concentrica, *Shaw*, Gen. Zool., vol. iii. p. 43, pl. ix. fig. 1.

Testudo centrata, *Daudin*, Hist. Nat. des Rep., tom. ii. p. 155.

Emys centrata, *Merrem*, Versuch. eines Syst. der Amphib., p. 26.

Emys centrata, *Schweigger*, Prod. Arch. Königsb., vol. i. p. 301, 426.

Emys centrata, *Say*, Jour. Acad. Nat. Scien. Phil., vol. iv. p. 205.

Emys centrata, *Fitzinger*, Neue Class. der Rep., p. 45.

Emys centrata, *Harlan*, Med. and Phys. Res., p. 153.

Testudo palustris, *Leconte*, Ann. Lyc. Nat. Hist. N. Y., vol. iii. p. 113.

Emys concentrica, *Gray*, Synop. Rep., p. 27.

Emys concentrica, *Dumeril et Bibron*, Hist. Nat. des Rept., tom. ii. p. 261.

Salt-water Terrapin, *Vulgo*.

DESCRIPTION. The shell is oval, almost entire, or slightly emarginate behind, depressed, and obtusely carinate. The vertebral plates are five in number; the anterior is the largest, pentagonal, with its two shortest margins directed forwards; the second, third, and fourth, are hexagonal, the latter very irregularly so, its posterior margin being much the smallest; the fifth is heptagonal; each of these

vertebral plates has a protuberance; that of the fourth is the most prominent; these tubercles, taken together, give an obtusely carinated appearance to the shell—some varieties have the prominences but slightly developed. Of the lateral plates, the anterior is irregularly quadrilateral, largest at its lower and anterior border, where it is joined to four marginal plates; the second and third are pentagonal; and the fourth very irregularly quadrilateral. The marginal plates are twenty-five in number; the nuchal, or intermediate, varies in shape—sometimes triangular, with its apex truncate and directed anteriorly; at others it is almost quadrilateral; the remaining marginal plates are nearly quadrilateral; the five posterior are slightly revolute, and thus form at times a sort of gutter.

The sternum is sub-oval, entire in front, and extending even as far as the shell; it is emarginate behind, does not reach the length of the carapace, and is covered with twelve plates marked with concentric striæ. The gular plates are triangular, with their apices directed backward; the brachial are nearly quadrilateral, the lateral margins most extensive; the thoracic and abdominal plates are oblong squares, and the sub-caudal lozenge-shaped. Of the supplemental plates, the axillary are irregularly quadrilateral and broadest before, while the inguinal are triangular and broadest behind.

The head is very large, broadest posteriorly, narrow, and almost pointed in front; above, it presents a smooth surface, as if the head were covered with a single large rhomboidal plate, differing in some degree in colour from the rest of the animal. The jaws are strong and cutting, the superior slightly emarginate; the inferior curved in front, and furnished with a hook. The eyes are small, the pupil black, the iris gray, approaching the colour of the skin. The neck is short and thick.

The anterior extremities are moderately long, and scaly before; scaly and granulate behind; the fingers are five in number, webbed, and each furnished with a short strong nail. The posterior extremities are rounded above, but flattened at the tarsus; scaly in front and granulate behind; there are five toes, fully webbed,

but four only are furnished with nails. The tail is short, thick at the root, but small and pointed at the tip, and covered above with a row of scales, which gives it a sharp ridge.

COLOUR. The colour of this animal varies a good deal, more perhaps than that of any other Emys; generally speaking, it is dusky brown, though frequently it is greenish, or dark olive colour. The marginal plates are all yellowish beneath, each with a ring of dark grey colour; in the centre of this ring occurs frequently a dark spot: sometimes we find two or three of these rings placed one within the other, with intermediate yellow lines, and a yellow spot in the middle.

The sternum also varies in colour; it is generally yellowish, marked with concentric striæ and dusky lines; seldom more than two on a plate, forming squares, which are sometimes single, sometimes double, the inner line always following the figure of the outer; at other times the sternum is entirely yellow.

The crown of the head is sometimes very dark; sometimes greenish, or olive. The jaws are horn colour, mottled with dark spots, or crossed by transverse dark lines or bars. The side of the head, the neck, as well as the extremities, are dusky or greenish-white, studded with innumerable black dots; these are sometimes so disposed as to give a marbled appearance to the skin.

DIMENSIONS. Length of shell, $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches; length of sternum, 7 inches 2 lines; elevation, 2 inches 10 lines.

HABITS. The Emys terrapin lives in salt water and in salt marshes, where it hibernates; far from these it is never seen. It is a timid animal, easily disturbed, and hiding itself on the least alarm. It swims with great rapidity, and, unlike its tribe in general, moves quickly even on land.

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION. This is a widely extended animal, abounding in marshy places, from Rhode Island, where they have been observed by Dr. Maurant,

to Florida. They exist also along the northern shores of the Gulf of Mexico, according to Dr. Binney, who saw them at New Orleans, and I have received living specimens from its southern shore. This seems to be the only Emys common to North and South America, and it is not singular, when we consider, that all others of the tribe live in fresh water—this alone in salt; consequently it might be driven by currents from island to island, and from one shore of the Gulf to the other, like the *Chelonia* or sea tortoises; and yet I have never received them from any of the West India islands, nor have I any evidence of the existence of the *Emys terrapin* among them.

They are very abundant in the salt marshes around Charleston, and are easily taken when the female is about to deposit her eggs, in the spring and early summer months. They are then brought in immense numbers to market; yet, notwithstanding this great destruction, they are so prolific that their number appears undiminished. Their flesh is excellent at all times, but in the northern cities, it is most esteemed when the animal has been dug out of the mud in its state of hibernation. The males are smaller than the females, and have the concentric striæ more deeply impressed.

GENERAL REMARKS. This animal was certainly first described by Schoepff in his *Historia Testudinum*, and accompanied with an excellent figure. Schoepff observed it in the United States himself, where he was surgeon to a German regiment during the war of the revolution; and he also received it from Muhlenberg, who sent him specimens of many other animals. He called it *Testudo terrapin*, a name I have retained in this work, not because I like it—on the contrary, it is inappropriate, being in common parlance applied to the whole genus—but on account of its priority, which in every instance should rigidly be adhered to. The specific name *centrata* of the French Naturalists, or, better still, *concentrica* of the English, is the one I should prefer, but cannot adopt either, for the reason above given.

It is possible this may be the animal mentioned by Brown,* but nothing can be

positively determined from his description: "anterior extremities with five, posterior with four toes; body of a compressed oval form, and seldom exceeds eight or nine inches in length: is often served up at gentlemen's tables, and looked upon by many as good food: frequents the lagoons and morasses of Jamaica." Yet this is all that Gmelin had to establish the species *Testudo palustris*, in his edition of the *Systema Naturæ* of Linnæus. The name is well enough, and Leconte, in his excellent Monograph on the North American Tortoises, has retained it. Yet I cannot agree with him, in considering the *Testudo palustris* of Gmelin, and the *Testudo terrapin* of Schoepff as identical, and must therefore adopt the name of the latter, as he first accurately described it.

* Civil and Natural History of Jamaica, p. 465.



Holbrook, John Edwards. 1842. "Emys terrapin – Schoepff." *North American herpetology; or, A description of the reptiles inhabiting the United States* 1, 87–92.
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