



Chelonura Temminckii.

J.H. Richard, del

Gyrocampa lacertina (Linn.) *sig. p. 414*

F.S. Duval, Lillo. Phil^a

CHELONURA TEMMINCKII.—*Troost*.*Plate XXIV.*

CHARACTERS. Head enormously large, triangular, broad behind, pointed before, covered above and on the sides with plates; upper jaw strong, "*vulturiform*," hooked in front, cutting margin waving; lower jaw with a strong tooth in front, received in a fossette of the upper; shell tricarinate, sub-round, considerably concave in front, deeply emarginate and dentate behind; marginal plates thirty-one, placed in two rows at the flanks; tail without a crest.

SYNONYMES. *Chelonura Temminckii*, *Troost*, manuscript.

DESCRIPTION. The shell is sub-quadrangular, with its angles rounded, considerably concave anteriorly over the neck, and deeply emarginate and dentate posteriorly. Of the vertebral plates, the anterior is sub-trapezoidal, a little rounded in front and convex behind, with a prominent tubercle above, which commences the vertebral carina; the second is hexagonal, concave in front, carinated, and with a tubercle at the centre of the posterior margin; the third is quadrilateral, with a similar tubercle, but higher; the fourth is shaped like the third, but with a notch behind; the fifth vertebral plate is sub-pentagonal, narrower above and broader below, with its anterior border projecting into the posterior margin of the fourth, and is surmounted with the highest tubercle; these prominences make an elevated and tuberculated vertebral carina. The first lateral plate is sub-triangular, with its anterior and inferior border rounded, and joined to five marginal plates; the second and third are quadrilateral, and the fourth very irregularly hexagonal: each of these plates is surmounted by a knob or tubercle, as in the vertebral range, but placed at the superior and posterior part of the

plate; that of the fourth is most elevated; these prominences make on each side a tuberculated lateral ridge, quite as high as the vertebral, so that the shell is tricarinate. There are thirty-one marginal plates, of which the nuchal, or intermediate, is short, sub-quadrangular, and very extensive in the transverse direction; it is concave anteriorly, and slightly so at its lateral borders, with a prominence on its superior posterior face; the first marginal is irregularly pentagonal, with an elevated prominence at its outer and anterior part, at which begins the lateral carina; the second is sub-trigonal, with its base before and rounded, and its apex truncated and turned backwards; the third and fourth are elongated, quadrilateral, with their anterior margins slightly convex; the fifth, sixth and seventh are also quadrilateral, but are much more elongated and narrow; the eighth is quadrilateral and broad; the ninth sub-rhomboidal; the tenth, eleventh and twelfth are also sub-rhomboidal, each with a strong projecting point backwards, which gives the serrated and dentated appearance to the posterior margin of the shell. On the sides of the shell, and between the lateral and marginal plates, are interposed three supernumerary plates on each side. There seems, however, to be some variety in their number, for Troost, whose accuracy no one doubts, observed in his specimens four, whereas in the only specimen that I have ever seen there were but three; the anterior large, pentagonal, with an acute angle above, passing in between the lower margins of the first and second lateral plates, and straight below, where it joins the fifth, and slightly the sixth marginal plates; the second supplementary marginal plate is regularly quadrilateral, and is interposed between the second lateral and sixth marginal, touching also slightly the seventh; the third of these plates is also quadrilateral, and situated between the second and third lateral and seventh marginal plates.

The sternum is narrow and cruciform in shape, and resembles that of the last described animal, though there the wings descend a little from the sternum, while here they pass off at a right angle. Troost says it is covered with plates, similar in form and number to those found on the sternum of the *Chelonura serpentina*; yet in the specimen that I saw, the abdominal plates were subdivided, and it

differed in some other respects; but, as the sternum was dried, such observations cannot be relied on.

The head is enormously large, and regularly triangular if seen from above, its basis behind and its apex before; it is covered superiorly and laterally with polygonal plates; the vertical plate is beautifully urceolate, pentagonal, broadest behind, narrow before; the superior orbital plates are elongated, quadrilateral, and project over the eye, as in *Crotalus*; the frontal is irregularly quadrilateral, smaller before, where it projects over the nares, and broader behind, descending to form a portion of the orbit of the eye; the occipital plate is very large, covering most of the head, is of polygonal form, and joined to many of the plates of the head, in front to the vertical and superior orbital, and in all other places is surrounded by smaller plates; the first of these is placed behind the superior orbital, and is of an irregular oblong form, joining also with the posterior orbital and superior temporal plates; the second is larger, and situated between the occipital and superior temporal; and still behind this are several smaller polygonal plates; the central one is largest; the posterior orbital plate is regularly pentagonal, concave in front and above for the orbit, straight in front and below where it touches the corneous part of the lower jaw; there are four or five temporal plates, of which the two anterior are largest, the upper quadrilateral, and joined to the corneous covering of the upper jaw in front. The snout is pointed, the nares anterior and close together. The eyes are large and very brilliant, the pupil dark grey, the iris golden, with angular dark projections surrounding its outer margin. Each jaw is protected by a firm horny covering. The upper jaw is strong, sharp, and pointed at its extremity, extends beyond the lower, and is furnished with a remarkable hook in front, projecting beyond the lower, and descending at right angles to the frontal plane, behind which the cutting margin is waved or notched, as in some birds of prey. The cutting edge of the under jaw is equally firm, and has an equally well developed hook or tooth in front, which is received in a fossette of the upper jaw. The mouth, though large, is less so in proportion than in the *Chelonura serpentina*. The neck is short, large, sub-cylindrical, and covered with a tough, abundant, loose, folded,

and granulated skin, with large warts here and there interspersed, both above and below; many of these warts have horny points, though flexible at their base.

The anterior extremities are large, stout, broad, covered with a granulated skin and a few large scales placed transversely on the fore-arm, especially towards the lower and posterior part; there are five fingers, palmated, and a narrow fold of skin extends from the little finger along the fore-arm on its outer and posterior margin; the nails are strong, stout, and slightly curved, and nearly two inches in length. The posterior extremities are equally large in proportion, but more flattened towards the tarsus, and covered with a granulated scaly skin, with some larger warts about the nates, and a few large scales on the tarsus; the toes are five in number, fully palmated, with the web continued broad, like a fringe, along the posterior border of the extremity; there are four long horny nails. The tail is long, round, covered with a warty skin, and three rows of circular or oval plates, more or less elevated in their centre; here and there they may be seen raised into a round tubercle; these plates or scales are placed one on the vertebral line, and one on each side. Whether the tail below is covered with bifid plates, as in the *Chelonura serpentina*, I cannot say, as the only specimen that I have seen was dried, so that this arrangement was not perceptible.

COLOUR. The head is dusky above; the upper jaw is dingy-yellow, mixed with grey and white; the lower jaw is darker grey, and yellowish near the base. The neck is dusky above and dingy-yellow beneath. The shell is greyish or horn coloured, a little darker near each prominence. The sternum is yellow, more or less dingy. The superior surface of the extremities and tail is dusky, the inferior dirty yellowish-white.

DIMENSIONS. Length of head, 8 inches; length of neck, $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches; circumference of neck, 1 foot 10 inches; length of shell, following the curve, 1 foot 10 inches; length of sternum, 1 foot 4 inches; length of tail beyond the anus, 1 foot $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches.

HABITS. As far as is known, the habits of this animal are similar to those of the *Chelonura serpentina*, found in the same waters, and living on similar food. Troost observed in the intestines of one the remains of fish bones, fragments of a large species of unio, &c. Troost kept a *Chelonura Temminckii* in confinement for several weeks; it remained chiefly in the same place; only once or twice it crossed the little yard in which it was placed, and that was during a rain; if the heat of the sun was intense, it retired to the shade of a tree, where it fixed its residence, or sometimes it preferred the protection of the fence that surrounded the yard. In this way several days were passed, without its moving more than three or four feet, though frequently teased by children. The flesh is much esteemed as food, and is said to be not inferior in delicacy to the Green Turtle, which, I think, is much to be doubted.

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION. The *Chelonura Temminckii* inhabits the Mississippi river and its tributary streams, as well as some of the rivers of Alabama that open into the Gulf of Mexico.

GENERAL REMARKS. A good deal of obscurity has hitherto hung over the history of this animal, which is now perfectly removed. Troost was undoubtedly the first person who distinguished it from the allied species, *Chelonura serpentina*, and sent drawings and descriptions of it to some European naturalists; but they never having seen the animal, supposed it to be only an overgrown specimen of the *Chelonura serpentina*,* which indeed it does resemble in many respects; it is found in the same localities west of the Alleghany mountains, and is known by the same name, Snapping Turtle or Loggerhead; yet, on minute examination, there will be observed differences enough to make it a distinct species, if not even to place it in a new genus, as will be seen in the anatomical part of this work. Troost has collated the following specific characters of each, which are constant, whatever be the age of the animal, and he has seen them of all ages.

* Vide Dumeril et Bibron, tom. ii. p. 349; also Temminck and Schlegel, in Seibold's Japan, partie Erpetologique, &c.

CHELONURA TEMMINCKII.

1. Head very large, triangular, covered with plates; upper mandible "vulturiform," hooked in front, the hook descending at a right angle from the frontal plane, and with a fossette for the tooth of the lower jaw.
2. Skin of neck is granulated, and has warty excrescences, horny at their tips.
3. Marginal plates thirty-one; a double series at the sides.
4. Tail round, and covered with three rows of circular or oval plates, more or less prominent in the centre.
5. DIMENSIONS—Length of head, 8 inches.
Length of neck, $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches.
Circumference of neck, 1 foot 10 inches.
Length of shell, 1 foot 10 inches.
Length of sternum, 1 foot 4 inches.
Length of tail beyond anus, 1 foot $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches.

CHELONURA SERPENTINA.

- Head smaller, oval, covered with closely adherent skin above and a few small plates at the sides; hook of the upper mandible recurved; no fossette for the tooth of the lower jaw.
- Skin of neck granulated, no spiny warts, but with two flexible long warts at the chin.
- Marginal plates twenty-five, single series.
- Tail more or less oval, surmounted with a crest of wedge-shaped tubercles, diminishing in size towards the tip.
- DIMENSIONS—Length of head, $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches.
Length of neck, $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches.
Circumference of neck, $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches.
Length of shell, 9 inches.
Length of sternum, 8 inches.
Length of tail beyond anus, $2\frac{3}{4}$ inches.



Holbrook, John Edwards. 1842. "Chelonura temminckii – Troost." *North American herpetology; or, A description of the reptiles inhabiting the United States* 1, 147–152. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.326770>.

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