

First record of Chinese Softshell Turtle (*Pelodiscus sinensis*) on Catanduanes Island, Bicol peninsula, Philippines

Cyrus Job P. DELA CRUZ & John Ronel GIL

ccyrusjob.delacruz@bicol-u.edu.ph (Dela Cruz), ejohnronelgil@yahoo.com (Gil)

Observers: Kimberly D. Geromo, Lorenz Kurt Co Abrasaldo.

Photograph by: Kimberly D. Geromo.

Subject identified by: Cyrus Job P. Dela Cruz, Rafe M. Brown.

Location: Palnab Del Sur, Virac, Catanduanes Island, Bicol peninsula, Philippines (13°33'50.18" N 124° 13' 10.36" E)

Elevation: 0 metres.

Habitat: Tidal river estuary, with sandy substrate.

Date and time: 23 November 2018, 07:30 hrs.

Identity of subject: Chinese Softshell Turtle, *Pelodiscus sinensis* (Reptilia: Testudines: Trionychidae).

Description of record: An adult Chinese Softshell Turtle was observed walking in sandy, intertidal habitat near Pajo River in Palnab Del Sur, Virac, Catanduanes. It was photographed *in situ*, and left in place (Fig. 1). The turtle appeared to be in healthy condition. Carapace length was not measured.

Remarks: The Chinese Softshell Turtle, also known as Pawikang luno in Tagalog, occurs widely in both natural and artificial lakes and ponds, reservoirs, flooded rice fields, and irrigation ditches in the Philippines (Diesmos et al. 2008).

This species is characterized by having (i) an oval shaped carapace, (ii) smooth margin, (iii) colouration of mixed green and brown with details of black spots on the carapace, (iv) a head and neck which are long and slender, (v) eyes that are almost on the top of the head, (vi) a proboscis and (vii) a black stripe starting from the eyes (Auliya, 2007).



Fig. 1.

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Fritz et al (2010) identified different genetic lineages within *Pelodiscus sinensis*, which appears to be a species complex, however confident identification of different lineages (or potentially other, closely-related species) based on colouration and patterning is difficult, thus we identify the turtle in this image as simply *Pelodiscus sinensis*.

This is a non-native species in the Philippines primarily introduced via commercial farming and meat source (Sy et al. 2004, Diesmos et al. 2008). It has previously been recorded on the islands of Luzon, Mindoro, Panay, Cebu, Bohol, Leyte and Mindanao (Diesmos et al. 2008, Sy, 2014). Populations of Chinese Softshell Turtle in the Bicol region have now been successfully established in the provinces of Albay (which lies 73.7 km southwest of Catanduanes Island and is the nearest part of its known range), Camarines Sur (Diesmos et al. 2008), Camarines Norte and Sorsogon (pers. obs.).

This documentation of Chinese Softshell Turtle provides a new distributional record on Catanduanes Island, and a new habitat type in an estuarine area.

A photographic voucher was submitted to the Zoological Reference Collection, Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum, National University of Singapore (ZRC (IMG) 2.393).

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