

First record of Asian Giant Softshell Turtle (*Pelochelys cantorii*) in western Mindanao, Philippines

Emerson Y. SY and Irish Y. ANTABO-NOGOT
emersonsy@gmail.com (Sy)

Observers: Roland Marimon, Hernandino Mangubat, Mamerto A. Insag, Vicarl P. Arcayan, Virnie A. Bagonbon, Irish Y. Antabo-Nogot.

Photograph by: Irish Y. Antabo-Nogot.

Subject identified by: Emerson Y. Sy.

Location: Murcielagos Bay, off Mindanao Island, Barangay Nangca, Municipality of Rizal, Zamboanga del Norte Province, Philippines.

Elevation: Sea level.

Habitat: Seawater near coast.

Date and time: 11 January 2021, 05:00 hrs.

Identity of subject: Asian Giant Softshell Turtle, *Pelochelys cantorii* (Reptilia: Testudines: Trionychidae).

Description of record:

A large softshell turtle with a Straight Carapace Length (SCL) of 61 cm, was found entangled in nets of a fishpen in Murcielagos Bay.

The turtle was rescued, photographed (Fig. 1), and reported to the regional office of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR).

The DENR staff documented, measured, and eventually released the turtle unharmed in a river in Zamboanga del Norte on the same day.



Figure 1.

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Remarks:

The turtle was identified as *Pelochelys cantorii* based on (i) its large size, (ii) head relatively small, (iii) very short proboscis, (iv) carapace is flat and surrounded by soft cartilaginous margins, (v) carapace colour is olive, and (vi) plastron is uniform off white and without markings (Taylor, 1920). The Asian Giant Softshell Turtle has a widespread distribution occurring in Bangladesh, India, China, Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines and in various habitats such as lakes, rivers, and seacoasts (Das, 2008).

In the Philippines, this mainly freshwater turtle is known to occur on the Islands of Luzon (Cagayan, Isabela, Quirino) and Mindanao (Agusan del Sur, Davao del Norte) (Diesmos et al., 2008). The species is rarely observed in the wild and is usually documented when accidentally caught by fishermen using hooks and lines in freshwater habitats. This note provides the first record of the Asian Giant Softshell Turtle in Zamboanga del Norte Province and the westernmost record on Mindanao Island.

References:

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Diesmos, A.C., Brown, R.M., Alcala, A.C. and Sison, R.V. (2008). Status and distribution of nonmarine turtles of the Philippines. Chelonian Conservation and Biology 7(2): 157-177.

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