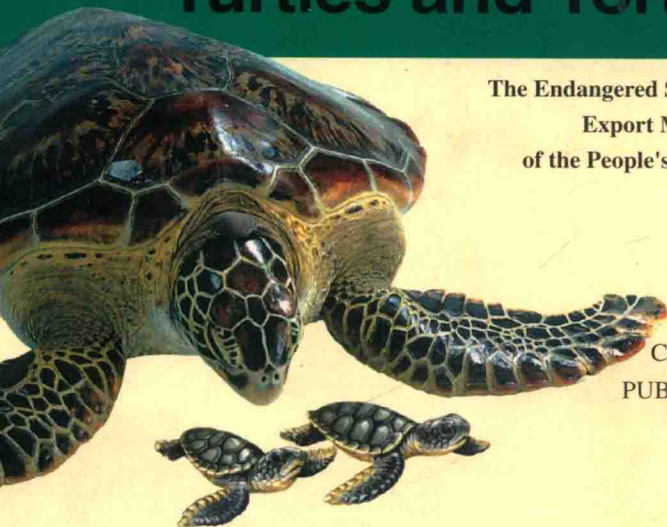


# Identification Manual For Common Turtles and Tortoises

The Endangered Species Import and  
Export Management Office  
of the People's Republic of China



CHINA FORESTRY  
PUBLISHING HOUSE



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**TRAFFIC**  
EAST ASIA



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# *Identification Manual For Common Turtles and Tortoises*

Publication of the manual is subsidized in part by grants from following organizations:

International Foundation of Animal Welfare  
World Wide Fund for Nature-China Programme  
TRAFFIC-East Asia  
Wildlife Conservation Society

We hereby express our sincerely appreciation to them.

**The Endangered Species Import and Export Management Office  
of the People's Republic of China  
(CITES Management Authority of China — CNMA)**

**CHINA FORESTRY PUBLISHING HOUSE**

## 图书在版编目(CIP)数据

常见龟鳖类识别手册 = Identification Manual For

Common Turtles and Tortoises: 英文版 / 中华人民共和国濒危物种

进出口管理办公室主编. — 北京: 中国林业出版社, 2002.3

ISBN 7-5038-3022-0

I. 常... II. 中... III. 龟鳖目-识别-手册-英文

IV.Q959.6-62

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字 (2002) 第 008489 号

## Cataloging-in-Publication Date

Identification Manual For Common Turtles and Tortoises:

The Endangered Species Import and Export Management Office

of the People's Republic of China, 2002.3

I.Common... II.China... III.Testudoformes-Identification-Manual

IV.Q959.6-62

China Forestry Publishing House

7. Liuhai Hutong, West City District, Beijing, P. R. China, 100009

Tel: 86 10 66184477

Fax: 86 10 66180373

E-mail: cfphz@public.bta.net.cn

定价: 160.00 元

# Content

## Preface

## Species Description

- 1 *Platysternon megacephalum* 8
- 2 *Chinemys reevesii* 10
- 3 *Chinemys megalocephala* 12
- 4 *Chinemys nigricans* 14
- 5 *Cuora amboinensis* 16
- 6 *Cuora aurocapitata* 18
- 7 *Cuora mccordi* 20
- 8 *Cuora pani* 22
- 9 *Cuora trifasciata* 24
- 10 *Cuora yunnanensis* 26
- 11 *Cuora zhoui* 28
- 12 *Cuora flavomarginata* 30
- 13 *Cuora galbinifrons* 32
- 14 *Geoemyda spengleri* 34
- 15 *Mauremys iversoni* 36
- 16 *Mauremys mutica* 38
- 17 *Mauremys pritchardi* 40
- 18 *Ocadia philippeni* 42
- 19 *Ocadia sinensis* 44
- 20 *Ocadia glyphistoma* 46
- 21 *Pyxidea mouhotii* 48
- 22 *Cyclemys dentata* 50
- 23 *Cyclemys tcheponensis* 52
- 24 *Sacalia bealei* 54
- 25 *Sacalia pseudocellata* 56
- 26 *Sacalia quadriocellata* 58
- 27 *Siebenrockiella crassicollis* 60
- 28 *Heosemys grandis* 62
- 29 *Heosemys spinosa* 64
- 30 *Hieremys annandalii* 66
- 31 *Notochelys platynota* 68
- 32 *Orlitia borneensis* 70
- 33 *Morenia ocellata* 72
- 34 *Hardella thurgi* 74
- 35 *Geoclemys hamiltonii* 76
- 36 *Batagur baska* 78
- 37 *Callagur borneoensis* 80
- 38 *Annamemys annamensis* 82
- 39 *Melanochelys trijuga* 84
- 40 *Kachuga tecta* 86
- 41 *Malayemys subtrijuga* 88
- 42 *Trachemys scripta elegans* 90
- 43 *Trachemys scripta scripta* 92
- 44 *Terrapene carolina triunguis* 94
- 45 *Terrapene ornata* 96
- 46 *Malaclemys terrapin* 98
- 47 *Pseudemys nelsoni* 100
- 48 *Graptemys kohnei* 102
- 49 *Chrysemys picta* 104
- 50 *Chelydra serpentina* 106
- 51 *Macroclemys temminckii* 108
- 52 *Eretmochelys imbricata* 110
- 53 *Chelonia mydas* 112
- 54 *Lepidochelys olivacea* 114
- 55 *Caretta caretta* 116
- 56 *Dermochelys coriacea* 118
- 57 *Indotestudo elongata* 120
- 58 *Indotestudo forstenii* 122
- 59 *Manouria impressa* 124

60	<i>Testudo horsfieldii</i>	126
61	<i>Testudo hermanni</i>	128
62	<i>Geochelone pardalis</i>	130
63	<i>Geochelone platynota</i>	132
64	<i>Geochelone elegans</i>	134
65	<i>Geochelone sulcata</i>	136
66	<i>Geochelone carbonaria</i>	138
67	<i>Carettochelys insculpta</i>	140
68	<i>Pelodiscus sinensis</i>	142
69	<i>Palea steindachneri</i>	144
70	<i>Pelochelys cantorii</i>	146
71	<i>Lissemys punctata</i>	148
72	<i>Aspideretes hurum</i>	150
73	<i>Chelodina siebenrocki</i>	152
74	<i>Chelus fimbriata</i>	154
75	<i>Phrynops hilarii</i>	156
76	<i>Emydura subglobosa</i>	158
77	<i>Kinosternon odoratus</i>	160

## Annex

List of Turtles and Tortoises Ranged in China 163

List of Turtles and Tortoises in CITES Appendices I, II and III 164

Resolution of CITES:

Conf. 11. 9 Conservation of and trade in freshwater turtles and tortoises in  
Asia and other regions 166

## Indexes

Scientific Name Index 169

English Name Index 171

Chinese Name Index 173

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## Preface

Over 270 species of tortoises and turtles are found around the world and at least 100 of these species are native to Asia. Turtles and tortoises are found on land, in rivers, swamps, lakes and in coastal areas and feed on plants, animals or both. They vary greatly in body size and weight: the terrestrial Galapagos Tortoise *Geochelone nigra* reaches over one metre in length and weighs several hundred kilograms; the Speckled Cape Tortoise *Homopus signatus* has a maximum carapace length of 96 mm. Turtles and tortoises are easily distinguished from other animals by their carapace, in general, have late reproduction cycles, and many species are slow moving and vulnerable to predation.

Turtles and tortoises have long been used by humans as food, medicine or for scientific research as well as having cultural significance in many societies, for example representing longevity in China. Although tortoises and turtles have probably been traded for centuries, international trade is now the most significant threat to the majority of species of freshwater turtles and tortoises in Asia. Animals are traded as pets, such as the Star Tortoise *Geochelone elegans*, for medicine, as with Reeves' Turtle *Chinemys reevesii* and the Chinese Stripe-necked Turtle *Ocadia sinensis*, and for food such as the Malaysian Giant Turtle *Orlitia borneensis*. Some species, for example the Chinese Softshell Turtle *Pelodiscus sinensis* are successfully bred in captivity but the majority of animals are harvested from the wild.

Many countries are involved in the trade in freshwater turtles and tortoises. Asia not only consumes huge quantities as food and medicine but also exports many specimens to North America and Europe for the pet trade. North America is also an exporter, and exports large numbers of specimens bred in captivity, such as the Common Red-eared Slider *Trachemys scripta elegans* and the Common Snapping Turtle *Chelydra serpentina*. Faced with declining and degraded habitats, introduced predators and competition as well as the huge volumes in local, regional and international trade, the conservation of freshwater turtles and tortoises has become ever more urgent.

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) aims to regulate trade to remain within legal and sustainable limits. At the eleventh Conference of the Parties (COP 11), held in Nairobi, Kenya in April 2000, the Parties listed all Asian Box Turtles *Cuora* spp. in Appendix II, and adopted Resolution Conf. 11.9 - Conservation of and trade in freshwater turtles and tortoises in Asia and other regions - to guide the Parties in conservation initiatives for freshwater

turtles and tortoises. The CITES Secretariat was also directed to convene a technical workshop to establish conservation priorities and actions to achieve the sustainable use of these resources.

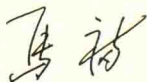
China is a range State for around 40 species of turtles and tortoises, and has a long history of captive breeding of freshwater turtles and tortoises, with particular success in the captive breeding of *Pelodiscus sinensis*. China also imports freshwater turtles and tortoises from Southeast Asia and North America to meet demand for this resource as food and traditional medicine, as well as for pets. The Chinese Government places great importance on the protection and management of freshwater turtles and tortoises. In 1988, China promulgated the Wild Animal Protection Law, effective 1989, which included 12 species of turtles and tortoises within its list of wildlife under special state protection. In 1998, China implemented the "Harmonized System Code for the import and export of wild animals and plants" under which all species occurring in China became subject to international trade regulations through a permit system requiring clearance by Customs. China also improved the control and management of trade in freshwater turtles and tortoises through limiting the species and quantity exported, not including *Pelodiscus sinensis* and *Chinemys reevesii*; strictly controlling the commercial export of other species; reducing the species and quantity imported into China; temporarily ceasing imports from certain countries; implementing an import regulation system of "one shipment, one permit"; inspecting all export permits; and limiting imports to certain ports. Since 1999, the CITES Management Authority of China (CNMA) has communicated several times with relevant source and transit countries in Southeast Asia in order to understand their relevant regulations, trade controls and requirements, etc. In May 2001, a delegation of the CNMA met with the CITES Management Authorities and related wildlife management authorities of relevant involved Asian countries to discuss co-operative measures to regulate trade. At the same time, the CNMA and Directorate General of Customs co-hosted enforcement training workshops at key ports, established supervisory departments and scientific research institutes in relevant provinces; initiated trade monitoring and assessment work; and carried out law enforcement activities particularly aimed at stopping illegal trade in freshwater turtles and tortoises. These actions have had significant results in the protection of wildlife and in actively promoting trade regulations.

To further enhance the enforcement of protection measures as well as the management



of import & export, and to facilitate the identification of specimens in trade by Customs and enforcement authorities, the CNMA has published this Identification Manual for Common Turtles and Tortoises. This manual includes 77 species from 11 families and 51 genera, and features those species that are most frequently seen in the international trade, some of which are traded in very high numbers. Also included are some species less commonly found in trade but included for comparison. The manual introduces relevant trade regulations as well as the morphological characteristics, biology and taxonomy with clear descriptions and pictures for identification. The manual will enable relatively fast identification of species through cross examining of specimens found in trade with this manual. The manual is intended for use by wildlife management and enforcement authorities, port customs and police as a tool for on-site inspection and identification of turtles and tortoises to facilitate enforcement of trade regulations. The manual will also serve a useful function in capacity building and public education.

It is the hope of the CITES Management Authority of China that this manual will assist in improving the implementation of import and export regulations and CITES trade provisions for turtles and tortoises, and aid in the promotion and enforcement of well developed trade regulations for these animals in China and in the Asian region.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of stylized Chinese characters, likely '马福' (Ma Fu).

(Ma Fu)

Vice Administrator of State Forestry Administration of the People's Republic of China  
Director General of The Endangered Species Import and Export Management Office  
of the People's Republic of China

September 2001, Beijing.

# Content

## Preface

## Species Description

- 1 *Platysternon megacephalum* 8
- 2 *Chinemys reevesii* 10
- 3 *Chinemys megalocephala* 12
- 4 *Chinemys nigricans* 14
- 5 *Cuora amboinensis* 16
- 6 *Cuora aurocapitata* 18
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- 16 *Mauremys mutica* 38
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- 18 *Ocadia philippeni* 42
- 19 *Ocadia sinensis* 44
- 20 *Ocadia glyphistoma* 46
- 21 *Pyxidea mouhotii* 48
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- 23 *Cyclemys tcheponensis* 52
- 24 *Sacalia bealei* 54
- 25 *Sacalia pseudocellata* 56
- 26 *Sacalia quadriocellata* 58
- 27 *Siebenrockiella crassicollis* 60
- 28 *Heosemys grandis* 62
- 29 *Heosemys spinosa* 64
- 30 *Hieremys annandalii* 66
- 31 *Notochelys platynota* 68
- 32 *Orlitia borneensis* 70
- 33 *Morenia ocellata* 72
- 34 *Hardella thurgi* 74
- 35 *Geoclemys hamiltonii* 76
- 36 *Batagur baska* 78
- 37 *Callagur borneoensis* 80
- 38 *Annamemys annamensis* 82
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- 40 *Kachuga tecta* 86
- 41 *Malayemys subtrijuga* 88
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- 43 *Trachemys scripta scripta* 92
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- 47 *Pseudemys nelsoni* 100
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- 54 *Lepidochelys olivacea* 114
- 55 *Caretta caretta* 116
- 56 *Dermochelys coriacea* 118
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- 58 *Indotestudo forstenii* 122
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63	<i>Geochelone platynota</i>	132
64	<i>Geochelone elegans</i>	134
65	<i>Geochelone sulcata</i>	136
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72	<i>Aspideretes hurum</i>	150
73	<i>Chelodina siebenrocki</i>	152
74	<i>Chelus fimbriata</i>	154
75	<i>Phrynops hilarii</i>	156
76	<i>Emydura subglobosa</i>	158
77	<i>Kinosternon odoratus</i>	160

## Annex

List of Turtles and Tortoises Ranged in China 163

List of Turtles and Tortoises in CITES Appendices I, II and III 164

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Conf. 11. 9 Conservation of and trade in freshwater turtles and tortoises in  
Asia and other regions 166

## Indexes

Scientific Name Index 169

English Name Index 171

Chinese Name Index 173

## Species Description



## *Platysternon megacephalum*

- English Common Name** Big-headed Turtle
- Chinese Name** 平胸龟、鹰嘴龟、大头龟、鸚鵡龟
- Taxonomy** Platysternidae
- Protected Category** National Protected Terrestrial Wild Animals That Are Beneficial, Or With Important Economic And Scientific Research Values (China)
- Distribution** Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Fujian, Guangdong, Guangxi, Yunnan, Guizhou, Chongqing, Hunan, Hainan and Hong Kong of China. Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand and Myanmar.
- Description** Its carapace (to 184 mm) is flat with a slight vertebral keel, and is indented anteriorly to the small cervical scute. Posteriorly, the carapace contains a slight notch, and the marginals are slightly serrated. The carapace ranges from yellow brown to olive. Plastron and bridge are yellow and there may be a central pattern of faded brown stipples, or dark-brown blotches, extending along the seam. Has a head so large that it cannot be withdrawn into the shell for protection; it is about half as wide as the carapacial width and completely covered dorsally by an enlarged scute. The head is yellow brown or red to orange with longitudinal striations or spots. The chin is yellow to brown and may show either dark or light mottling. Its toes are webbed and each digit contains three phalanges. Forelimbs are light to dark brown and covered with large scales along the inner and outer borders and the heel. The tail is almost as long as the carapace and is covered with large scales.
- Habitat and habit** This turtle prefers cool (12~17°C), rocky, mountain streams and brooks. One or two eggs are laid per clutch. Feeds on a variety of meats, fishes, and invertebrates in captivity.
- Trade** Commonly traded.









***Chinemys reevesii***

<b>English Common Name</b>	Reeves' Turtle, Chinese Three-keeled Pond Turtle
<b>Chinese Name</b>	乌龟、金龟、草龟、泥龟、金钱龟（幼体）、墨龟（雄性）
<b>Taxonomy</b>	Bataguridae
<b>Protected Category</b>	National Protected Terrestrial Wild Animals That Are Beneficial, Or With Important Economic And Scientific Research Values (China)
<b>Distribution</b>	China (south of the Yangtze River west to Guangdong in Mainland, Taiwan and Hong Kong). Japan, Korea and the Philippines.
<b>Description</b>	The elongated (to 236 mm) oval carapace is slightly arched, unserrated, but medially notched posteriorly, and has three longitudinal keels. The carapace ranges from light to dark brown with darker pigment along the keel, and, in some, light seams. The plastron is notched posteriorly. Both plastron and bridge are yellow with a large brown blotch on each scute. The head is moderate in size with a projecting snout and a slight medial notch on the upper jaw. It is dark brown to black with a series of elongated, broken, or curved yellow stripes on the sides. The tympanum is often ringed with yellow, and both chin and lower jaw may contain mottled yellow marks. The neck is grayish brown to black with several solid or broken, narrow yellow stripes. The limbs and tail are uniformly olive to brown. Females are larger than males, but males have tails with very thick bases and the vent beyond the carapacial rim.
<b>Habitat and habit</b>	Lives in shallow, soft-bottomed water of ponds, marshes, canals and streams, may enter river in some time. An omnivore, in captivity, it feeds on aquatic plants, fruits, and lettuce, as well as worms, aquatic insects, frogs and fishes. Courtship and mating occur in the spring. Nesting occurs from May to July. 4-9 eggs are laid each season.
<b>Trade</b>	Commonly traded.



***Chinemys megalocephala***

- English Common Name** Chinese Broad-headed Pond Turtle, Chinese Big-headed Pond Turtle
- Chinese Name** 大头乌龟、大头龟
- Taxonomy** Bataguridae
- Protected Category** National Protected Terrestrial Wild Animals That Are Beneficial, Or With Important Economic and Scientific Research Values (China)
- Distribution** Anhui, Jiangsu and Hubei of China.
- Description** This is a large *Chinemys* (to 228 mm) with an oblong carapace which is wider posteriorly than anteriorly, moderately domed, unserrated posteriorly, and with three keels. The carapace is brown to dark brown with a black, longitudinal medial atripe running along the dorsal keel. Both plastron and bridge are dark brown to black with yellow to green seams on the outer rim. The head is large and very broad, with the snout barely projecting and upper jaws not medially notched. The posterior surface is covered with small scales. Skin of the soft parts is olive. There are several small yellowish marks on the sides of the head, along with two postorbital stripes running to the neck. Males are much smaller than females, and have a concave plastron and a longer, thicker tail with the vent beyond the posterior carapacial rim.
- Habitat and habit** Usually found in ponds and streams near hillside. Lays a clutch of nine eggs.
- Trade** Occasionally traded.