

Inclusion of Giant Softshell Turtles *Pelochelys* spp. in Appendix II. Proponent: China and United States of America.

Summary: Species of Giant Softshell Turtles *Pelochelys* spp. can grow to a very large size, *P. bibroni* reaching a carapace length of over one metre and *P. cantorii* about 0.6 metre. Typically these omnivorous species are found in large rivers, preferring areas with a muddy or sandy bottom but they can also be found in sea and brackish water. A maximum clutch size of 27 eggs has been recorded, females may produce more than one clutch per season. The Giant Softshells are wide ranging, occurring in south and south-east Asia; distribution within several countries is poorly known. *P. cantorii* is classified as Endangered by IUCN. It is thought to be 'nearing extinction' in China and Myanmar, 'severely declining' in India and declining in Thailand possibly 'strongly' due to collection pressure; it is unlikely to be able to sustain present levels of hunting in Viet Nam. Hunting for food and food markets affects both species; there is a small demand for the pet trade. The species are in international trade though little information is available to assess quantities of exports from most countries. However, Malaysia reported exports of 4 300 individuals of *P. cantorii* during a ten month period in 1999. *Pelochelys* spp. are also suspected to be amongst those species exported in larger quantities from Indonesia and are often encountered in trade across land borders into China. Curios made from *P. cantorii* shells are frequently offered for sale in substantial numbers in Papua New Guinea. *Pelochelys* are protected from capture and export in some range States, but legislation may not be implemented effectively. The proponents seek inclusion of *P. cantorii* in Appendix II in accordance with Article II, Resolution Conf. 9.24, Annex 2a criteria A and B i) on the grounds that if international trade is not strictly regulated the species will meet the criteria for inclusion in Appendix I in the near future and that harvesting of specimens from the wild will exceed, over an extended period, the level that can be continued in perpetuity. *P. bibroni* is proposed for inclusion in Appendix II under Annex 2b criterion B for reasons of similarity of appearance. *Pelochelys* spp. reportedly closely resemble *Chitra* spp., which are proposed for inclusion in Appendix II (see proposal 12.31) and *Rafetus* spp., which are not currently included in the Appendices nor proposed for inclusion at CoP 12.

Analysis: Following Resolution Conf. 9.24 the available information suggests that *P. cantorii* meets the criteria for inclusion in Appendix II (Bi). The species is reportedly depleted and considered severely threatened in several range States and it is likely that international trade has been a major factor contributing to its decline. It seems unlikely that current levels of harvest for international trade are sustainable. *P. bibroni* meets the criterion for inclusion in Appendix II to help bring trade in *P. cantorii* under control (Annex 2b B).

Supporting Statement (SS)	Additional information
<u>Taxonomy</u>	
<i>P. cantorii</i> was previously considered a synonym of <i>P. bibroni</i> . Further taxonomic work may result in the description of several new species within the <i>Pelochelys</i> complex.	<i>P. cantorii</i> was reinstated by Webb (1995) for the <i>Pelochelys</i> populations inhabiting the Indomalayan region; the name previously used, <i>P. bibroni</i> , is now restricted to the species of southern New Guinea. <i>P. cantorii</i> provisionally <i>P. cumingii</i> of the Philippines in synonymy (Rhodin, 2002).
<u>Range</u>	
<i>P. bibroni</i> : Indonesia (Irian Jaya), Papua New Guinea	<i>P. cantorii</i> also occurs in Peninsular Malaysia (Sharma and Tisen, 2000).
<i>P. cantorii</i> : Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Indonesia (Sumatra, Borneo, Irian Jaya, Sulawesi (?)), India, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Papua New Guinea, Philippines Thailand and Viet Nam	
<u>IUCN Global Category</u>	
<i>P. bibroni</i> : VU A1cd+2cd	
<i>P. cantorii</i> : EN A1cd+2cd	

Supporting Statement (SS)	Additional information
Biological and trade criteria for inclusion in Appendix II	
<u>A) Trade regulation needed to prevent future inclusion in Appendix I</u>	
<p><i>P. cantorii</i> populations are depleted throughout much of the species' range and is considered critically endangered in several countries. The species is likely to meet criteria for inclusion in Appendix I in the near future if trade controls are not provided.</p>	
<u>B) Harvesting for international trade has, or may have, detrimental impact on population</u>	
(i) exceeds sustainable yield; (ii) reduces population to potentially threatened level	
<p>Information on the biology of these species is not included in the SS and little information is provided on habitat availability.</p> <p><i>P. bibroni</i>: is considered uncommon in Indonesia and Papua New Guinea, and population trends are unknown. It is hunted for food and trade in Indonesia and Papua New Guinea; the SS does not report any international trade in this species.</p> <p><i>P. cantorii</i>: Bangladesh: uncommon; Cambodia: good population; China: extinct in the wild or close to extinction; Indonesia: rare; India: severely declining, virtually eliminated, classified as 'Lower risk near threatened'; Lao PDR: critically endangered; Myanmar: severely depleted; Philippines: status unknown; Papua New Guinea: scarce throughout range; Thailand: in decline, possibly strongly, scarce and depleted, critically endangered or endangered; Viet Nam: critically endangered or probably extinct, the populations are unlikely to sustain present levels of hunting.</p> <p>The main threat to this species in all of its range States is hunting for subsistence food or food markets as well as wildlife trade in some. The species is threatened by international trade in Malaysia where between January and October 1999, 4 300 individuals were exported. A large number of masks made from <i>P. cantorii</i> shells is sold to tourists in Papua New Guinea. There is no specific information available on trade from other range States.</p> <p>There is an undetermined amount of illegal trade in turtles from Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia and Myanmar that may involve <i>Pelochelys</i> spp. The Asian Giant Softshell is uncommon in ground transport trade seizures in Viet Nam (though the trade in softshells may involve a different network), it is not known to be traded from India, though transboundary trade with Bangladesh may exist.</p> <p>Potential trade impacts on this species are unknown for several countries, however where information is available, it suggests declines in numbers of these slow-growing chelonians, which have a low reproductive rate.</p>	<p><i>P. cantorii</i> is categorised as critically endangered in Bangladesh, the main threats being hunting and illegal trade (IUCN Bangladesh, 2000).</p> <p>Genuine documented <i>Pelochelys</i> records exist from Hainan, China where the species is still said to occur (local hunters/collectors pers. comm. to Shi Haitao, 2001). In January 2002, the CITES Management Authority of China published the "Identification Manual for Common turtles and Tortoises". <i>P. cantorii</i> is included as a species which is "occasionally traded" (CITES Management Authority of China, 2002). However, the animal illustrated is <i>Rafetus swinhoei</i> (TRAFFIC Southeast Asia, 2002). Sixty to eighty individuals of the species reported as occurring in a reserve in Zhejiang Province and populations in Yunnan Province, are likely to be <i>Rafetus swinhoei</i> (TRAFFIC Southeast Asia, 2002).</p> <p><i>Pelochelys</i> sp. were reportedly observed in 'large quantities' in the cross border trade during surveys conducted in Guangxi and Guangdong, China (Liet al., 1996). A 1999 survey of the Yunnan (China) – Viet Nam cross border wildlife trade, reported more than five observations of live specimens of <i>P. bibroni</i> (Li and Wang, 1999).</p> <p>During a study of an exporting company in Medan, Sumatra (Indonesia), in September 1999, staff confirmed that <i>P. cantorii</i> were traded from there but in low numbers (Shepherd, 2000). Trade of <i>P. cantorii</i> in Sumatra was also reported by Fritz and Gaulke (1997).</p> <p>Hundreds if not thousands of curio masks are offered for sale at any given time in northern areas of Papua New Guinea and Port Moresby, a significant number of these are made from <i>P. cantorii</i> (Rhodin and Genorupa, 2000).</p> <p>A 1999 survey of the Yunnan (China) - Vietnam cross border wildlife trade, reported more than 5 observations of live specimens of <i>P. bibroni</i> (Li and Wang, 1999).</p> <p>Official US trade statistics show that small quantities of <i>P. cantorii</i> (as <i>P. bibroni</i>) were imported into the USA from Malaysia in the reporting period for 1998 to 2001 (TRAFFIC East Asia and TRAFFIC North America, 2002).</p>

Supporting Statement (SS)	Additional information
<p>Inclusion in Appendix II to improve control of other listed species</p>	
<p><u>Specimens resemble other species and are difficult to distinguish, or most of taxon is already listed</u></p>	
	<p><i>Tepedelen, 2002) believes that species in the genus Pelochelys are sufficiently difficult to distinguish and that a look-alike listing is warranted. Pelochelys is probably involved in more identification errors than any other species (TRAFFIC Southeast Asia, 2002).</i></p> <p><i>P. bibroni is so similar to Chitra species that it takes an expert to separate them (Praschag, 2002; TRAFFIC Southeast Asia, 2002), while the occurrence of Chitra in Indonesia was unrecognised, being mistaken for Pelochelys, for decades. Confusion with Rafetus species in China and Viet Nam is so widespread that the actual range of either genus remains undetermined (TRAFFIC Southeast Asia, 2002).</i></p>

Other information

Threats

These species are threatened by hunting throughout their range and by habitat destruction in Indonesia, China and Thailand.

Conservation, management and legislation

The species in their respective ranges are fully protected in India, Myanmar and Thailand. Export is prohibited from the Philippines and Viet Nam and is only allowed for scientific specimens from Papua New Guinea. The two species are managed on a local basis as a fishery resource in Indonesia (which can lead to over-exploitation).

Although it appears that wild animals cannot be hunted with traps, sold, commercialised or transported in Cambodia, there is a legal export of turtles, restricted by an annual quota and by the size of individual turtles.

China has recently taken several legal/regulatory measures to control imports and exports of freshwater turtles.

Freshwater turtles are protected from commercial trade in Lao PDR, but subsistence collection is allowed.

No protection is afforded in Bangladesh.

Legislation to protect turtles is not effectively implemented in several range States and Lao PDR and Viet Nam are taking steps to improve their domestic measures. A Turtle Conservation and Ecology project began in Viet Nam in 1998.

Legislation to protect turtles is not effectively enforced in Myanmar (CITES Management Authority of Myanmar, 2002).

Legislation in Cambodia is unclear.

For information on recent import restrictions to China, see Conservation, Management and Legislation section of the analysis of CoP 12 Prop. 20, to include Platysternon megacephalum in Appendix II.

The Qingtian Yuan nature reserve, with an area of about 11.65km² in the southwest of Zhejiang Province, China, was established for the protection of this species. (Wang, 2002).

The situation in Malaysia is unclear and legislation varies between different parts of the country, leading to non-standard protection or a lack of protection.

Supporting Statement (SS)	Additional information
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Captive Breeding

P. cantorii is bred in captivity for commercial sale in China. Breeding farms are being established in Viet Nam using animals confiscated from trade, but their success is unknown.

Pelochelys is not known to be bred in captivity in China or elsewhere as the animals are difficult to maintain in captivity (TRAFFIC Southeast Asia, 2002). There are no captive breeding farms for this species in China. However, the captive breeding of this species has been recorded in zoos (Wang, 2002).

The CITES Scientific Authority of Viet Nam is not aware of any turtle farms for this species (CITES Scientific Authority, 2002). No captive breeding operations in Viet Nam are registered as "for conservation" (TRAFFIC Southeast Asia – Indochina, 2002).

Other comments

Indonesia and the Philippines support this proposal.

The consensus recommendation of the Technical workshop on trade in freshwater turtles and tortoises in Asia, Kunming, China, 25-28 March 2002 supported this proposal and the species was regarded as one of the 11 highest priorities for inclusion in the Appendices.

The Cambodian Department of Fisheries treats the protection of turtles in Cambodia as a priority and is undertaking species inventories. Studies have not yet been extended to collect information on abundance and conservation management of turtles and the Department is reluctant to support the proposal without this information (CITES Management Authority of Cambodia, 2002).

Reviewers: N. Kalyar, TRAFFIC East Asia, TRAFFIC North America, TRAFFIC Southeast Asia, TRAFFIC Southeast Asia – Indochina.

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