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TECHNICAL BULLETIN

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SUBJECT : INFORMATION ON THE COLLECTION AND CONTROL OF THE POPULATION OF CHINESE SOFTSHELL TURTLES (*Pelodiscus sinensis*), AN INVASIVE ALIEN SPECIES, IN ALL AFFECTED REGIONS

The Chinese softshell turtle is an invasive alien species¹ (IAS). Based on recent reports, it appears that Chinese softshell turtles have proliferated in certain wetland and other areas of the country, including those devoted to aquaculture. The species is abundant in Pampanga (based on reports from DENR Region 3 and other sources) and has likely established populations in Rizal, Bulacan, Laguna, Nueva Ecija and Mindoro (E. Sy et.al. 2004). The overpopulation of Chinese softshell turtles poses a potentially significant threat to Philippine endemic and indigenous fish and aquatic animals as well as to local fishponds and fishery operations.

The introduction² of Chinese softshell turtles to wetland and other areas of the country is unauthorized, illegal and punishable with imprisonment of up to eight (8) years or a fine of up to P5,000,000.00, or both.³ Consequently, all Chinese softshell turtles found in the wild shall be *ipso facto* forfeited in favor of the government.⁴

Wildlife regulations do not prohibit the collection from the wild of Chinese softshell turtles for purposes of ensuring that populations of these species do not exceed ecological limits to the detriment of Philippine wildlife as well as local livelihood and industries. When supported by technical and scientific advice from the Regional Wildlife Management Committee (RWMC)⁵, the DENR Regional Executive Director may allow Filipino citizens, or corporations, partnerships, cooperatives or associations, 60% of the capital of which is owned by Filipinos, to collect Chinese softshell turtles for direct export purposes.⁶

¹ Invasive alien species (IAS) are organisms that are spread outside their natural distribution and become a threat to native ecosystems and biodiversity. They can be plants, animals, fungi or microorganisms that are introduced by transport or human activity, thrive and over time out-compete native species in the region or area where they are introduced. Most IAS grow rapidly, are good dispersers, and are highly adaptable to a wide range of conditions.

² "Bringing species into the wild that is outside its natural habitat." Wildlife Act, Section 5(p).

³ Wildlife Act, Sections 27(d) and 28.

⁴ Wildlife Act, Section 28.

⁵ Joint Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) of the Wildlife Act, Rules 6.1 and 6.3.


⁶ Joint Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) of the Wildlife Act, Rule 18.2.

Existing rules and regulations apply to the disposition of Chinese softshell turtles under the custody of DENR Wildlife Rescue Centers (WRCs).⁷ Given that the Chinese softshell turtle is an invasive alien species, the disposition is to be limited to direct export, euthanasia, and donation to non-profit charitable organizations for use as food, as deemed fit based on assessment by proper health authorities.

Holders of previously issued wildlife permits or certificates for the collection and/or possession of Chinese softshell turtle is to be subject to the stricter monitoring and reporting requirements.

Special attention is to be given in the identification of Chinese softshell turtle to ensure that no indigenous species of turtles are affected or collected. An identification guide as well as photographs for comparison of the Chinese softshell turtle with other soft-shelled turtle species are attached hereof for reference.

This Technical Bulletin is issued and circulated for the information and guidance of all concerned.



THERESA MUNDITA S. LIM
Director

⁷ Please refer to DENR Administrative Order No. 97-17 "Establishing the Disposition Program for Confiscated and Donated Wildlife in the Custody of DENR Wildlife Rescue Centers and Similar DENR Facilities and Providing Guidelines Therefor" (April 29, 1997).

Pelodiscus sinensis - Chinese Softshell Turtle

Chinese Softshell Turtle

Other Names: Labi China (Malaysia), Labi labi Cina (Indonesia)

Distributions: China; Japan; Taiwan; Viet Nam
Captive bred in large numbers

Physical Characteristics: Length: 25 - 35cm

International Conservation Status:
Not CITES listed

IUCN: VU



Credit: Bai Dang Phung

Distinguishing Features:

- Colour varies considerably (green, brownish grey)
- May have black markings on carapace (top shell)
- Long nose in comparison to most softshelled turtles
- Carapace often grooved

Hatchlings:

Red/orange (may be yellow or white) but always with black spots on rear legs and plastron (bottom shell), red fades with age.
Note: pattern varies between individuals



Credit: Mark Aubrey/TSEA



Credit: Bai Dang Phung

One distinct bump on front edge of carapace (top shell)



Credit: TSEA



Credit: TSEA



Credit: Mark Aubrey/TSEA

Traded as:

Live animals for the pet trade and for the meat trade



Hatchlings for sale in a pet shop
Credit: Chris Shepherd/TSEA



At a meat market
Credit: Mark Aubrey/TSEA

Similar to:

Amya cartilaginea
CITES Appendix II
IUCN: VU



Credit: Mark Aubrey/TSEA

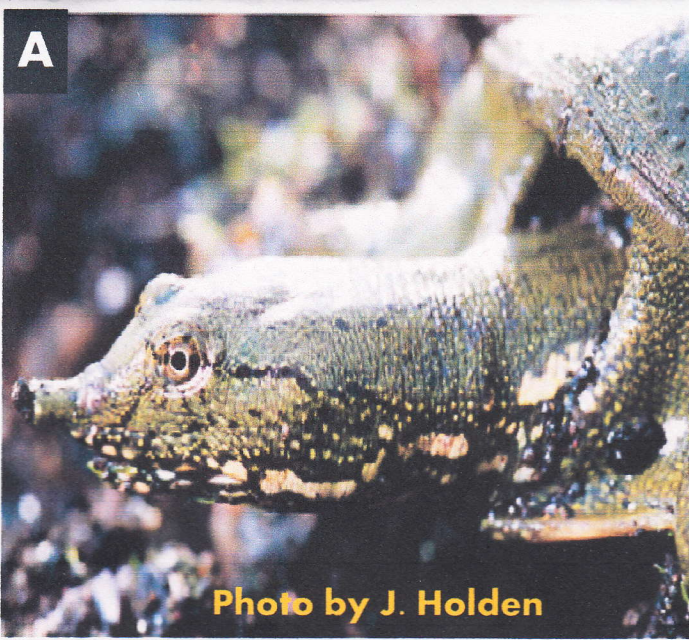
- Yellow dots on head and neck
- Long straight nose
- Front edge of carapace (top shell) rough with distinct bumps

Dogania subplana
Not CITES Listed
IUCN: LR



Credit: Mark Aubrey/TSEA

- Black line down the centre of the carapace (top shell)
- Front edge of carapace (top shell) smooth
- Long downturned nose

A**Photo by J. Holden****D****Photo by S. Schoppe****B****Photo by A.C. Diesmos****E****Photo by M. de Guia****C****Photo by S. Schoppe****F****Photo by M. de Guia**

(A & B) Chinese soft-shelled turtle, *Pelodiscus sinensis*
 (C & D) Malayan soft-shelled turtle, *Dogania subplana*
 (E & F) Cantor's giant soft-shelled turtle, *Pelochelys cantorii*