

Elseya latisternum

Sarah Macdonald, 2001

Authority: Gray, 1867

Common name: Saw-shelled turtle, Serrated snapping turtle

Description (Cann 1998; Ernst & Babour 1989; Pritchard 1979; Cogger 2000): This species was first described by Gray in 1867 from the British museum's north Australian collection. This side-necked turtle reaches a maximum size of 28cm. Broad, depressed oval carapace, broadest behind centre. The posterior rim has obvious serrations, vertebral groove present, neural bones absent. Large head with a projecting snout. Upper jaw is unnotched to slightly notched. Top of head covered by a large horny plate, sides extend down on either side of head to the tympanum. Plastron cream to yellow, brown towards edge of scutes. Colour varies with distribution from black to olive green to chestnut brown.

Similar species (Cann 1998): Most *Elseya* species have a somewhat serrated edge to the rear of the shell. Differences occur in colouring and size. *Elseya irwini* females have a pale head with a yellowish horny sheath on the crown. *Elseya dentata* have pale neck and underside of head in maturity. *Elseya bellii* have an unusual keel in shell during youth, and a yellow stripe from mouth to ear in maturity.

Range: (Cann 1998; Cogger 2000) Along the eastern coast of Australia from Richmond, NSW, north to the tip of Cape York. Extends west from Cape York to Ahrnem land, NT.

Ecology and behaviour (Cann 1998): This species tends to prefer swamps, billabongs, and creeks more than major rivers. These freshwater turtles are active throughout the day basking and feeding.

Breeding biology: Courtship is reported to occur throughout the year. Courtship involves a male approaching a female with a series of head bobs, and touching cloacal area of female with snout. Extended stroking of snout and barbels. Nesting occurs throughout the natural range between the months of September and January. There is the potential to produce up to 50 eggs per breeding season. Egg sizes have huge variation, from 20 to 35 mm diameter.

Parasites (Pichelin *et al.* 1999):

Monogeneans: *Neopolystoma cribbi*, *N. krefftii*, *N. macleayi*, *N.sp.*

Polystmoides australiensis, *P.sp.*

Digeneans: *Aporchis aequalis*, *Notopronocephalus peekayi*

Sigmaopera cincta, *Uterotrema sp.*

References:

Cann, J. (1998) Australian freshwater turtles. Beaumont Publishing Pty Ltd, Singapore.

Cogger, H.G. (2000) Reptiles and Amphibians of Australia. Reed New Holland, Sydney.

Ernst, C.H. & Babour, R.W. (1989) *Turtles of the World*. Smithsonian Institute Press, USA.

Pichelin, S., Thomas, P.M. & Hutchinson, M.N. (1999) A checklist of helminth parasites of Australian reptiles. *South Australian Museum Monograph Series No.5*: 1-61.

Pritchard, P.C.H. (1979) *Encyclopedia of Turtles* THF Publications Inc. USA.