

Nilssonina hurum (Gray 1830) – Indian Peacock Softshell Turtle

INDRANEIL DAS¹, DHRUVAJYOTI BASU², AND SHAILENDRA SINGH³

¹Institute of Biodiversity and Environmental Conservation, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak,
94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia [idas@ibec.unimas.my];

²Katerniaghata Foundation, (R)1/737 Vikas Nagar, Lucknow 226 022, Uttar Pradesh, India [dhrubasu@rediffmail.com];

³Centre for Herpetology, Madras Crocodile Bank Trust, Post Bag 4, Mamallapuram 603 104,
Tamil Nadu, India [shailendra_mcbt@yahoo.com]

SUMMARY. – The Indian peacock softshell turtle, *Nilssonina hurum* (Family Trionychidae), is a relatively abundant large riverine species that is found in rivers and reservoirs. The species attains a rather large size (carapace length to 60 cm). It is distributed over eastern Pakistan, northern and central India, Bangladesh, and Nepal. The species is primarily nocturnal and omnivorous, juveniles observed feeding on mosquito larvae and fish, while adults consume snails, earthworms, prawns, fish, frogs, carrion, and vegetation. Animals maintained in captivity are known to eat rice and palm sugar sweetmeats. Courtship takes place underwater, and spherical, brittle-shelled, eggs in clutches numbering 20–30 are produced between August to November; hatching takes place between June–July of the following year. The species is heavily exploited for its meat and calipee (the outer cartilaginous rim of the shell) throughout northern and eastern India and Bangladesh. The intensity of exploitation to which it is subject suggests that both some kind of quota or closed season system, as well as protection of nesting areas, are necessary.

DISTRIBUTION. – Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan. Distributed across eastern Pakistan, northern, central, and eastern India, southern Nepal, and all of Bangladesh.

SYNONYMY. – *Trionyx ocellatus* Gray 1830a, *Trionyx ocellatus*, *Gymnopus ocellatus*, *Trionyx hurum* Gray 1830b, *Isola hurum*, *Aspideretes hurum*, *Aspidonectes hurum*, *Tyrse hurum*, *Amyda hurum*, *Nilssonina hurum*, *Gymnopus duvaucelii* Duméril and Bibron 1835, *Trionyx sewae* Gray 1872, *Trionyx bellii* Gray 1872, *Trionyx buchani* Theobald 1874.

SUBSPECIES. – None.

STATUS. – IUCN 2010 Red List: Vulnerable (A1cd+2d) (assessed 2000); CITES: Appendix I; Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act: Schedule I; Bangladesh Wildlife (Preservation) Act: Schedule III.

Taxonomy. – The first name proposed for this taxon was *Trionyx ocellatus* Gray 1830a (Plate 78 in *Illustrations of Indian Zoology*; the specific epithet corrected later

in the same work to *Trionyx ocellatus*), showing dorsal and ventral views of a juvenile. Webb (1980) showed that *Trionyx ocellatus* Gray 1830 is a primary (junior) homonym



Figure 1. Adult female *Nilssonina hurum* from the Brahmaputra River, India. Photo by Chittaranjan Baruah.