

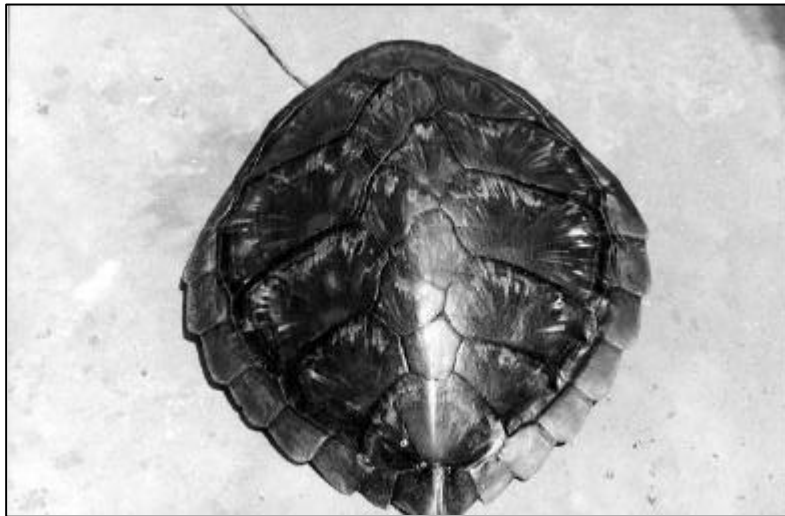
Some notes on an interesting carapace from Maharashtra

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This carapace was collected by Varad Giri, Bombay Natural History Society, during his survey of sea turtles on the Maharashtra coast in 2000. Though the markings resemble that of a juvenile green turtle, *Chelonia mydas*, the scute

pattern is puzzling. I sent the image to CTURTLE (email discussion group) and asked for opinions. I have summarised the results of my survey below.



Six of the 10 respondents identified the carapace as an immature green turtle, while hawksbill (*Eretmochelys imbricata*), loggerhead (*Caretta caretta*) and olive ridley (*Lepidochelys olivacea*) turtles each received a couple of votes. 'Hybrid' was also suggested. Some argued that since the forward most costal (lateral) scute meets the nuchal scute on both sides, it would be hard to defend anything but *L. olivacea* or *C. caretta*. Because of the very round shape, it might be *L. olivacea*. It was pointed out, though, that the frontal region is not very clear, and an observer might mistake the first vertebral for the nuchal scute.

The consensus was that it is a juvenile green turtle with scute aberrations; i.e., subdivided vertebrals. In summary:

➤ The shell is roundish, marginals not dentate but scalloped; pattern of radiating brown lines in scutes

- A hawksbill would have dentate marginals
- A loggerhead would have a knob on the last vertebral
- A ridley would have straight sides to the vertebrals, so that they appear as octagons, and the anterior of the shell would be higher. There should also be some remnants of a medial keel on a shell of this size.

My opinion: It is still tempting to dream about hybrids and the shell is on its way to the laboratory. If this is the product of an Indian inter-caste marriage, we'll soon know.

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