

Heterocyathus aequicostatus were collected. This zooxanthellate Indo-Pacific species has previously been recorded from Aride although the Indian Ocean records are omitted from Veron & Stafford-Smith (2000) and there is some confusion over the identity of the Indian Ocean species. In Seychelles two other species have been recorded: *H. alternatus* Verrill, 1865 (Poivre) and *H. sulcatus* (Verrill, 1866) (Aride, Poivre and D'Arros). In addition *H. hemisphaericus* Gray, 1849 is recorded from the Indian Ocean. As with other member of the genus, *H. aequicostatus* is associated with the commensal sipunculan worm *Aspidosiphon corallicola* Sluiter.

References

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NOTES

Osteological finds on Trois Mamelles mountain extends the known ecological range of the extinct endemic Mauritian tortoise *Cylindraspis* sp.

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This note reports the find of *Cylindraspis* bones made by the author on the south facing flank of the Trois Mamelles mountain in 1996 at latitude 20° 18' 31"S and longitude 57° 26' 43" E. A large number of small fragments of carapace and possibly of plastron, a humerus and a femur were uncovered in deposits under a rock overhang on a ledge at an altitude of 480m together with a rich collection of snail shells. Many of these shells belong to long extinct species, testifying to the old age of the deposit. Similar deposits have indeed been dated at 2,500 to 1,000 years (Griffiths 2000). Samples of the bones were sent to the Natural History Museum, London for identification which was unfortunately not possible beyond genus level (pers. comm. N. Arnold).

Mauritius had two endemic species of land tortoise of the genus *Cylindraspis* (Austin & Arnold 2001). These were *C. triserrata* and *C. inepta*, both described by Gunther in 1873 who originally placed them in the genus *Testudo*. Both went extinct in the 18th century as a result of the combined action of hunting by humans and predation by introduced vertebrates (Cheke 1987). Historical records mentioned the abundance of tortoises in coastal areas and on several islets around Mauritius. There were however no records of endemic tortoises living far inland away from the coastal lowlands although a closely related species was known to have done so on nearby Réunion island (Cheke 1987).

As reported in the literature, *Cylindraspis* bones were subsequently uncovered at 17 sites over Mauritius, 11 of which are in the lowlands below 50m above sea level (Fig. 1.).

These include bones from limestone caves on Ile aux Aigrettes off the SE coast of Mauritius and La Prairie (SW coast) and from sand dunes in Flic en Flac on the west coast (Austin & Arnold 2001) as well as from the Mare aux Songes swamp in the southeast (Arnold 1979) and a variety of other marshes (Bour 1984). The remaining 6 finds were probably all made between 150-280m a.s.l. Three of these sites are described well enough to have precise altitudes. They are 'Mt Zaco', 1.4km west of Brise Fer Mountain (ca. 150m) (Austin & Arnold 2001), Camp de Masque (235m) and Palma (280m) (Bour 1984). The other three finds were collections made by Louis Etienne Thirioux in the 19th century and unfortunately the site descriptions are too vague to allow precise location. Thirioux collected the bones from what appear to have been a number of sites in caves and screes at Anse Courtois, Le Pouce and Corps de Garde (Bour 1984). While possible, it is unlikely that these collections could have been made above 450m in altitude, given that surveys have as yet failed to reveal any cave in those areas above such altitude. On the other hand, subfossil deposits 1,000-2,500 years old are known from under rock overhangs ('caves' of Thirioux?) in the lower reaches of Le Pouce towards Port Louis, 1.5 km from the summit (Griffiths 2000) and tortoise bones had already been collected at the foot of the Corps de Garde mountain before Thirioux. Indeed, it is even possible that Thirioux's sites might have been as low as 100 m in altitude in the Pouce Valley and Anse Courtois and 200m at Corps de Garde. For these three sites, the midpoints between the possible extremes were used in Fig. 1.

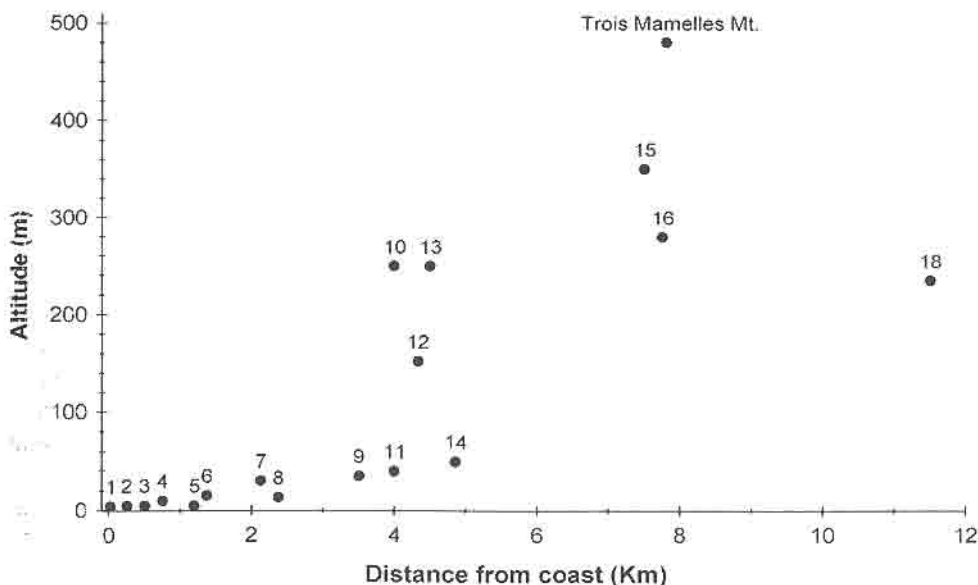


Fig. 1. Localities of finds of *Cylindraspis* bones on Mauritius, indicating altitude and distance from the coast. 1: Ile aux Aigrettes limestone cave; 2: La Prairie; 3: Flic en Flac sand dunes; 4: Mare aux Songes; 5: Mare du Puit; 6: Les Quatre Cocos; 7: La Mare La Chaux; 8: Mare Sèche; 9: Vallée des Prêtres; 10: Anse Courtois; 11: Flacq; 12: 'Mt Zaco'; 13: Le Pouce; 14: Riche Mare; 15: Corps de Garde; 16: Palma; 17: Camp de Masque. The site recorded in this note is marked as Trois Mamelles Mt. The culminating point on Mauritius is 828m and the greatest distance from the coast is 17 km.

The find reported here thus represents the highest confirmed altitude (480m) at which *Cylindraspis* bones have until now been uncovered in Mauritius. The site is also 7.9 km from the nearest coastline which makes it the second most inland locality for *Cylindraspis* on the island after Camp de Masque (11.5km from the nearest coast).

This find provides evidence that the Mauritian tortoises did not keep to the coastal areas or lowlands but instead also ventured far inland till fairly high altitudes. They could thus have been an important biotic factor impacting on the inland vegetation communities via seed dispersal and herbivory.

References

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NOTES

First results of radio-tracking black mud turtles *Pelusios subniger parietalis*

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The Seychelles subspecies of the African black mud turtle *Pelusios subniger parietalis* is endemic to the Seychelles islands where it is found on 5 islands: Mahé, Cerf, Praslin, La Digue and Fregate. Both this subspecies and the Seychelles yellow-bellied mud turtle *P. castanoides intergularis* are Critically Endangered due to habitat loss, predation and invasion by alien water plants (Gerlach & Canning 2001). Declines continue with the recent loss of small populations on Cousin island and possibly also Curieuse, these are probably stochastic losses and highlight the vulnerability of fragmented populations.

The Seychelles Terrapin Conservation Project of The Nature Protection Trust of Seychelles aims to provide these species with a secure future. The project recorded the first successful captive breeding in 2000 for *P. subniger*, since then 23 hatchlings have been reared and eggs of *P. castanoides* have been obtained.