

NOTES

Conclusion

The re-discovery of *C. seychellensis* roosts on Silhouette is further evidence of the importance of that island as a "biodiversity hot spot". While further research is needed to elucidate the biology and ecology of *C. seychellensis*, our knowledge of the species is expected to improve considerably as a result of Joubert's fieldwork. It may be added here that in 1994 he encountered foraging bats along the path to Anse Major and near La Gogue Dam and, in 1995, he discovered a bat guano deposit, but no bats, inside a cave at La Réduit, Takamaka (all localities on Mahé island).

References

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- Matyot, P. 1995 - Sightings of the sheath-tailed bat *Coleura seychellensis* Peters, 1868 (Chiroptera: Emballonuridae). *Phelsuma* 3: 74-76

NOTES

The rediscovery of *Pelusios seychellensis*

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In the western Indian Ocean the terrapin genus *Pelusios* is represented by three species on Madagascar and in Seychelles, with introduced populations in other island groups. The Seychelles populations are taxonomically distinct, two as endemic sub-species (*Pelusios castanoides intergularis* Bour, 1983 and *P. subniger parietalis* Bour, 1983) and the third as an endemic species (*P. seychellensis* (Siebenrock, 1906)) (Bour 1983 & 1984). Of these *P. seychellensis* is only known from three specimens collected by A. Brauer on Mahé in 1895 (Bour 1984; Siebenrock 1909). The lack of subsequent records has raised concern over its survival and all three species are believed to be endangered due to recent dramatic declines in the area and quality of suitable habitat (Gerlach 1996).

In November 1994 a terrapin was found crossing a road at 8am at Le Niof, Mahé by R.&G. Gerlach. It was photographed and released. The photographs were examined by us in February 1996 and recognised as *P.*

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seychellensis. This identification is based on descriptions and figures given by Bour (1983 & 1984) and has been confirmed by R. Bour (*pers. comm.*).

Description

The 1994 specimen was an adult female (carapace length 265mm, width 116mm, height 92mm). The carapace is distinctive in having a low keel from the posterior part of vertebral 1 to the anterior of vertebral 5 (restricted to vertebrae 4 and 5 in *P. castanoides* and absent from *P. subniger*). Vertebrae 1-3 and 5 are broader than long and vertebral 4 is as broad as long (as in *P. subniger*, but in *P. castanoides* vertebrae 1-4 are at least as long as broad). The width of the two first marginals is almost equal to anterior width of vertebral 1 (these are smaller in both other species). Colour uniformly black.

The plastron is 158mm long. The gulars are separated by a relatively small intergular: the anterior gular margin is twice as wide as the anterior intergular margin and the intergular is 1.5 times as long as broad. In the other species the intergular is larger and broader. The plastron is predominantly black, with yellow patches restricted to worn areas and along hinge (it is yellow in the other species).

The upper jaw is serrated and unhooked. Postocular and masseteric scales are narrowly separated by a moderately sized supralabial scale. The dorsum of the head is brown and the sides, tympanum, lower jaw and neck are pale yellow. Iris pale blue-grey (darker in the other species). The limbs and tail are yellow.

Conservation prospects

The confirmation that *P. seychellensis* survives on Mahé makes research into the status of Seychelles terrapins of great importance. The Nature Protection Trust of Seychelles is developing a conservation plan for the three species based on a population survey, this project was shortlisted for the 1996 Whitley Award for Animal Conservation.

References

- Bour, R. 1983 - Trois populations endémiques du genre *Pelusios* (Reptilia, Chelonii, Pelomedusidae) aux îles Seychelles; relations avec les espèces africaines et malgaches. *Bull. Mus. natn. Hist. nat., Paris 4,5,A*, 1: 343-375.
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- Gerlach, J. 1996 (Ed.). (in prep) - *The 1996 Seychelles Red Data Book*, The Nature Protection Trust of Seychelles, Seychelles.
- Siebenrock, F. 1909 - Über die Berechtigung der Selbständigkeit von *Sternotherus nigricans seychellensis* Siebenr. *Zool. Anz.* 34 (11/12): 359-362.