

A yellow-spotted river turtle at Pasir Ris

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Subject: Yellow-spotted river turtle, *Podocnemis unifilis* (Reptilia: Testudines: Pelomedusidae).

Subject identified by: Chua Keng Soon.

Location, date and time: Singapore Island, Pasir Ris Park, Sungei Tampines at about 0.5 km from the stream mouth; 21 July 2018; around 1000 hrs.

Habitat: Mangrove-lined stream with brackish water, flowing through urban parkland. At low tide.

Observer: Chua Keng Soon.

Observation: An example with carapace length of about 20 cm was observed resting, probably basking, on a branch overhanging around 0.5 m above the flowing water (see accompanying picture). A family of four smooth-coated otters (*Lutrogale perspicillata*) had swum past without noticing the turtle. The turtle had appeared to be undisturbed by the presence of the otters in its vicinity. It is likely to have clambered onto the branch when the branch was submerged during high tide.

Remarks: The yellow-spotted river turtle is native to tropical South America where it inhabits large rivers and lakes of the Amazon and Orinoco basins. This largely aquatic freshwater species feeds on aquatic plants, fallen fruit, molluscs and aquatic insects, and adults can attain a carapace length of 47 cm (Bonin et al., 2006: 100 as *Podocnemis cayennensis* which is a suppressed senior synonym [see Rhodin et al., 2017: 217]). The featured individual, presumably half-grown, appears to be an abandoned pet that may have been illegally imported. It seems to be the first record of *Podocnemis unifilis* in Singapore (see Ng & Lim, 2010).

References:

- Bonin, F., B. Devaux & A. Dupré, 2006. *Turtles of the World*. A & C Black Publishers Ltd, London, UK. 416 pp.
- Ng T. H. & K. K. P. Lim, 2010. Introduced aquatic herpetofauna of Singapore's reservoirs. *COSMOS*. 6 (1): 117-127.
- Rhodin, A. G. J., J. B. Iverson, R. Bour, U. Fritz, A. Georges, H. B. Shaffer & P. P. van Dijk, 2017. Turtles of the World. Annotated checklist and atlas of taxonomy, synonymy, distribution, and conservation status (8th edition). *Chelonian Research Monographs*. 7: 1-292. doi: 10.3854/crm.7.checklist.atlas.v8.2017



Dorso-lateral view of the turtle resting on a tree branch over Sungei Tampines. Photograph by Chua Keng Soon