A carcass of an olive ridley turtle at East Coast beach

Ng Juat Ying, Collin H. Y. Tong & Koh Kwan Siong

Subject: Olive ridley turtle, Lepidochelys olivacea (Reptilia: Testudines: Cheloniidae).

Subject identified by: Ng Juat Ying & Kelvin K. P. Lim.

Location, date and time: Singapore Island, East Coast Park, on beach near carpark G; 25 August 2018; morning.

Habitat: Sandy beach on reclaimed land.

Observers: Johnson Lock, Collin Tong, Ng Juat Ying and others.

Observation: A carcass in an advanced stage of decomposition was found by a member of the public in the morning stranded among rocks in the intertidal zone of the beach at low tide (see accompanying picture). The carapace length is around 65 cm, and there is a crack at the anterior part of the carapace. The observer then informed the National Parks Board of his find. The carcass was collected and deposited in the Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum at the National University of Singapore.

Remarks: The olive ridley is widely distributed throughout the Indo-Pacific, and is the world’s smallest sea turtle. It does not grow beyond 80 cm in carapace length, and has a broad, heart-shaped carapace with 5 to 9 pairs of juxtaposed costal scutes (Das, 2010: 173). The species is largely carnivorous and is known to feed on crustaceans, molluscs and jellyfish. In the seas around Peninsular Malaysia, it does not appear to be as common as the other sea turtles. Although it is known to nest on the beaches along the east coast of Peninsular Malaysia (Hendrickson & Alfred, 1961: 193), it does not do so in large aggregations as those on the beaches along the east coast of India where up to 150,000 females may come up to lay eggs in one night (Lim & Das, 1999: 34-35).

Although expected to occur in Singapore waters, the presence of the olive ridley turtle there had not been formally recorded (see Chua & Lim, 2011). However, the species is known to have been artificially introduced in the Singapore Strait. On 5 June 2002, a batch of 25 sea turtles consisting of green turtle, hawksbill turtle, loggerhead turtle and olive ridley turtle were released by Underwater World Singapore at Siloso Beach on Sentosa Island. These individuals, ranging from 200 g to 100 kg, had been confiscated by the Marine Police and by the Agri-food and Veterinary Authority from illegal traders at various parts of Singapore. These turtles were then handed to Underwater World aquarium where they were nursed back to health and maintained at the facility for between nine months and eleven years (van Miriah, 2002; Zheng, 2002). It is not known if the released olive ridley turtles were imported or locally obtained, and if they had remained in Singapore waters after release.

The status of the featured specimen is uncertain. It is not known if it had died in Singapore territorial waters, or if the carcass had drifted in from outside the country’s port limits. We are unable to ascertain the cause of the crack at the anterior part of the carapace. It is also not known if the turtle had succumbed to this particular injury, or if the injury was acquired after the turtle had already died.
Fig. 1. Dorsal view of the carapace of the turtle carcass. Photograph by Collin Tong

References: