

OCCURRENCE OF RIDLEY SEA TURTLES IN THE WESTERN CAROLINE ISLANDS.—There appear to be no published records of the sea turtle genus *Lepidocheleys* in Micronesian waters. The following information is offered toward a better understanding of this genus and its life history.

On November 30, 1973, a pair of unusual sea turtles were observed mating in deep water over the reef near the M'il Channel, NW Yap, western Caroline Islands. The male was larger and was mounted on the female in typical sea turtle mating position. Other sea turtles were seen in the vicinity.

The female was captured and measured 64 cm carapace length, and 65 cm carapace width (both measurements curved). She was identified (Deraniyagala, 1939) to be a specimen of *Lepidocheleys olivacea* (Escholtz), by the possession of seven coastal lamellae on the carapace, the first of which is in contact with the nuchal (Fig. 1A, drawn from the specimen). All other species of sea turtles possess six or fewer coastal lamellae. The carapace is very broad and depressed and flares slightly upwards along the outer margins. A slight mid-dorsal bony ridge is present. Outline of the carapace is smooth anteriorly and serrated posteriorly. Color is blackish and the lamellae are very thin and desquamate in small flakes. Scallation of the head is also consistent with this species (Fig. 1B, drawn from the specimen).

No mature eggs were present but the oviduct which measured about 49 cm in length and

11 mm in diameter appeared flabby, possibly indicating recent nesting. The largest follicles in the ovaries measured about 4 mm in diameter and numbered about 135 per ovary. The intestinal tract and stomach of the specimen were empty except for a few small crabs and strips of plastic.

The shell of another *Lepidocheleys* taken in Lamotrek atoll has also been examined. It measures 29 cm carapace length, and 31 cm carapace width, and possesses six coastal lamellae on the right side of the carapace, and six coastal lamellae plus a small, abnormal 7th on the left side. Ernst and Barbour (1972) indicate that *Lepidocheleys olivacea* may possess five to nine coastal lamellae on each side, while Bustard (1973) gives a range of six to nine. Bustard indicates that *L. kempii* (Garman), the Atlantic Ridley, may rarely possess six coastal lamellae. The distribution of this species is the Atlantic Ocean however.

The small shell differs from the large specimen additionally by having a much more pronounced mid-dorsal ridge with six prominent bony projections, one less vertebral lamellae, and a more pronounced serrated margin extending from the 6th marginal lamellae posteriorly.

In addition to the above records from Yap District, Cushing (1974) reports that five *Lepidocheleys* were accidentally caught on long lines and in a plankton net by a research vessel at sea between latitude 0-4°N, longitude 131-137°E between September 13th and 20th, 1974.

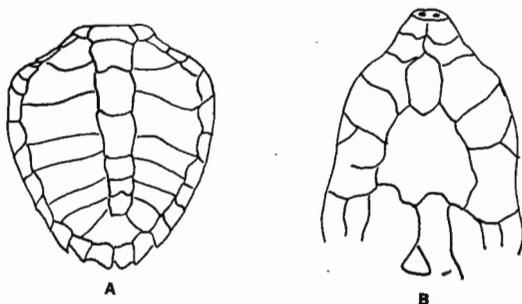


Fig. 1. *Lepidocheleys olivacea*. A. Carapace showing seven coastal lamellae; B. Scallation of the head.

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- M. V. C. FALANRUW, M. MCCOY and NAMLUG,** *Yap Institute of Natural Science, Box 215, Yap, Western Caroline Islands 96943.*