



*Chelonia caretta.*

*Thalassochelys caouana* Fitz.  
*Atq. Vol. I p. 384*  
 4.



CHELONIA CARETTA.—*Linnæus*.*Plate IV.*

CHARACTERS. Head of great size; upper jaw nearly straight; lower jaw more or less hooked; shell elongated, sub-cordiform, smooth, with a crescentic notch in the posterior border; vertebral plates five; lateral plates ten, not imbricated; marginal twenty-five; two spines to each extremity.

SYNONYMES. Loggerhead Turtle, *Catesby*, Carolina, &c., vol. ii. p. 40, pl. xl.

*Testudo caretta*, *Linnæus*, Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 351.

*Testudo caretta*, *Gmelin*, Syst. Nat. Lin., tom. i. part iii. p. 1038.

*La Caouana*, *Lacépède*, Quad. Ovip., tom. i. p. 96.

*Testudo caretta*, *Schoepff*, Hist. Test., p. 67, tab. xvi.

*Testudo caretta*, *Latreille*, Hist. Nat. Rept., tom. i. p. 53.

*Testudo caouana*, *Daudin*, Hist. Nat. des Rept., tom. ii. p. 54, tab. xvi. fig. 2.

*Testudo caretta*, *Shaw*, Gen. Zool., vol. iii. part i. p. 85, pl. xxiii., xxiv., xxv.

*Chelonia caouana*, *Schweigger*, Prod. Arch. Königsb., vol. i. p. 292, 418.

*Caretta cephalo*, *Merrem*, Versuch eines Syst. der Amphib., p. 18.

*Chelonia caouana*, *Wagler*, Natürlich. Syst. der Amphib., p. 133.

*Chelonia caouana*, *Gray*, Synops. Rept., p. 53.

*Chelonia caouana*, *Dumeril et Bibron*, Hist. Nat. des Rept., tom. ii. p. 552.

Loggerhead Turtle, *Vulgo*.

DESCRIPTION. The shell is sub-cordiform, slightly concave in front and over the shoulder, and with a deep crescentic notch behind. The anterior vertebral plate is hexagonal, with its largest border in front, and slightly arched forwards, and is most extensive in the transverse direction. The second and third plates are hexagonal, elongated, much the most extensive in the longitudinal direction, with



short lateral angles, connected with the adjoining lateral plates; the fourth vertebral is also hexagonal, but shorter, and with lateral angles more extended; the fifth vertebral plate is pentagonal, slightly concave in front, with extensive lateral margins and four articulating facets below. In the old animal all these plates are nearly on an horizontal plane; the first being but very little curved downwards in front, and the fifth as little behind. The lateral plates are five in number, the first is smallest, with regularly triangular margins, and its basis directed forwards and downwards; the second is irregularly quadrilateral, rounded below and in front; the third and fourth are pentagonal, with two short borders above, meeting at an obtuse angle; the fifth lateral plate is irregularly quadrilateral, broader below, or it has its posterior and inferior angle truncated where it joins the eleventh marginal, which gives it a pentagonal form.

Of the twenty-five marginal plates, the intermediate, or nuchal, is short in the longitudinal, and more than three times as large in the transverse direction; it is small in the middle, slightly concave behind, and much more so in front, and large at its lateral extremities, each having two articulating surfaces, an upper smaller, to join with the first lateral, and a lower larger, to unite with the first marginal plate. The anterior marginal is irregularly quadrilateral and arched outwards; the second is also quadrilateral, but concave in front; this and part of the fourth making a border arched inwards over the anterior extremities; the third is irregularly quadrilateral, smaller above, larger below; the remaining marginal plates to the eleventh included, are quadrilateral, and make an entire border, sometimes waving, between the tenth and eleventh; the twelfth or supra-caudal plates are sub-rhomboidal, and have a deep crescentic notch between them at their posterior margin.

The sternum is very full and rounded in front, smaller, but rounded behind. The gular plates are large equilateral triangles, with their outer border rounded; the brachial are regularly pentagonal, and so are the thoracic plates, but elongated; the abdominal are broad and pentagonal; the femoral are also pentagonal, but very irregularly so, having their posterior and external border concave; the



sub-caudal are triangular, with their outer borders rounded. There are four principal supplemental plates, the anterior of which is small, and does not reach the sternum; the three others are very large; the second is pentagonal, and joins the thoracic; the third is quadrilateral, and unites with the abdominal; the fourth is trapezoid, and is connected both with the abdominal and femoral plates; besides these, there are some smaller plates that border the brachial and thoracic; the two larger of which connect the second supplemental with the anterior border of the thoracic plate, but none reach the shell.

The head is extremely large, broad behind, rather rounded in front, and covered above with about twenty polygonal plates of various sizes. The vertical is small and hexagonal; on each side it has the superior orbital, which are elongated, pentagonal and broadest within; behind these are the posterior superior orbital, one on each side, of similar form but larger without; behind these again, and on the same longitudinal line, are the parietal plates, of irregular pentagonal form; in the midst of all these plates, and united to all, is a large broad occipital, having two or three small plates on its posterior border. There are three posterior orbital plates; the superior of which is pentagonal and large, the middle is hexagonal and nearly of the same size; the inferior is largest of all, oblong, and makes part of the inferior wall of the orbit; behind these are four longitudinal rows of temporal plates, varying in size and number; the frontal are large and pentagonal, the nasal are small and hexagonal, with a narrow elongated trapezoid inter-nasal plate, which is continued back between the anterior part of the frontal. The upper jaw is protected by a thick horny covering, rounded in front and broad, narrow behind and reaching under the orbit of the eye.

The nostrils are anterior, near together, and placed in a cartilaginous substance that occupies the space between the nasal plates and the horny covering of the upper jaw. The eyes are large and prominent; the lids are covered with small plates, and open obliquely from behind downward and forward; the pupil is deep sea-blue, with a dusky grey iris. The upper jaw is strong, nearly a straight line, being but slightly bent downwards in front; the lower jaw is equally firm and



strong, and is more or less hooked or turned upwards in front. The neck is short, very thick and strong, and covered with a granulated skin and minute flexible plates both above and below.

The anterior extremities are long and powerful, rounded at the shoulder, covered with a tough skin and with a few scattered minute flexible plates, depressed and flattened like a fin at the fore-arm, carpus and fingers, and covered with large square pentagonal plates. A remarkable range of these exists along the anterior border; while the posterior margin is bordered with a loose fold of skin capable of distention, in which are placed here and there large plates; in front there are two spines or nails, corresponding with the two first fingers, and of these the first is largest and often hooked. These nails vary in extent; sometimes they are more than an inch long. The posterior extremities are much shorter, rounded above, covered in like manner, and only become flattened like a paddle toward the tarsus and toes, where alone are found large plates. The posterior extremity is also armed with two spines; but these are smaller, shorter and near together. The tail is short, thick, and conical.

**COLOUR.** The plates of the head are yellowish-chestnut or olive-brown in their centre, but have their margins so yellow as to give a strong tinge to the whole; the jaws are yellowish horn-colour. The plates of the shell are light brown, varying in degree, and have sometimes a tinge of olive, and are often bordered with a dirty yellowish tinge; the marginal have it more distinctly, which gives to the whole shell a strong shade of yellow; the young are at times coloured not unlike the Green Turtle; in very old animals the whole shell becomes dusky olive, as seen in the accompanying figure, and the shell is covered with various parasitic animals, as *Serpulæ*, *Balani*, and other multivalve shells, &c.; the upper surface of the extremities, and tail is dusky along their centre, but yellow on the borders; the inferior surface of the whole animal is yellow, more or less clouded.

**DIMENSIONS.** Length of head,  $12\frac{1}{2}$  inches; breadth of head, 10 inches; length of shell, 3 feet 6 inches; breadth of shell, 34 inches; length of sternum, 28 inches.



This is the largest species of Tortoise with a hard shell; sometimes weighing, it is said, sixteen hundred pounds. The young animal varies considerably from the adult in shape and colour; the shell is shorter and broader in proportion; the vertebral plates have each a tubercle, which forms a distinct carina; the lateral have similar tubercles, but smaller, and these finally disappear as the Tortoise advances in years; the posterior and external angles of most of the marginal plates project so much as to give a serrated appearance to more than half of the posterior part of the shell. The jaws, though equally strong in proportion to the size of the animal, are both but slightly hooked in front, the inferior most so. The colour of the young differs in having the chestnut-brown more distinct and often radiated with yellowish or lighter brown.

**HABITS.** This animal is much bolder than the *Chelonia mydas*, and lives altogether on animal food; it is extremely voracious, and devours great quantities of shell-fish, as the various *Buccinii* and *Trochi*, especially a large conch (*Strombus*) which it breaks easily between its stout mandibles. It is a strong swimmer, and is frequently seen in the midst of the ocean, floating on the surface of the waves, motionless, and apparently asleep; in which situation they are often captured.

**GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION.** This animal has a much wider range than the Green Turtle, and is found on the shores of nearly all the Atlantic states, and frequently lays its eggs on the southern aspect of sandy shoals, along the coast of Georgia, Carolina and Virginia. Though much more wary and shy in its habits than the *Chelonia mydas*, yet it takes far less pains in seeking out retired and desolate spots to deposit its eggs.

**GENERAL REMARKS.** The Loggerhead has the same enemies to contend with as the Green Turtle; though he is sought after with little ardour, as his flesh is so rank and tough that it is nearly unfit for nourishment, especially in old animals, and their shells cannot be used in the arts; yet the war against their eggs is equally exterminating, as they are as good food as those of any other species.

Sometimes the young are brought to our markets, and are considered tolerable food; or the old animal is cut up and sold in pieces by the pound, as is sometimes the better kind of Turtle, but only to people unacquainted with the appearance of the flesh, and then the venders conceal the head, to escape detection.

To Dr. B. B. Strobel I am indebted for a singular variety of this animal, if it should not prove a distinct species. The form of the body is nearly the same, but the margin of the shell is entire posteriorly; the neck is short, with a large flexible wart on either side. The animal came from Key West, and was unfortunately destroyed before a full description could be made out.



Holbrook, John Edwards. 1842. "Chelonia caretta – Linnaeus." *North American herpetology; or, A description of the reptiles inhabiting the United States* 2, 33–38.  
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