



On the occurrence of crowned river turtle, *Hardella thurjii* in Gujarat, India

The crowned river turtle, *Hardella thurjii* (Gray, 1831) is widely distributed from Pakistan to Bangladesh, and possibly in western Myanmar (Das & Bhupathy 2009). It prefers the middle and lower reaches of the northern river systems on the Indian subcontinent, comprising the Indus, Ganga, Brahmaputra, and their tributaries (Das & Bhupathy 2009). The species is classified as Endangered, but nationally remains a poorly protected species under the Indian Wildlife Protection Act (Ahmed *et al.* 2021). This communication presents the first photographic evidence of the crowned river turtle, from Gujarat State, India. It was previously reported from North Gujarat two decades ago (Sharma 2000), but without any evidence.

On 25 March 2021, a live healthy turtle (body weight 550 g; Straight carapace length 11.8 cm) was deposited at a wildlife rescue centre in Vadodara by a local. The turtle was found while it was roaming on the road near Harni (22°20'29.95"N, 73°13'8.24"E), located between two freshwater bodies, in the suburbs of Vadodara City. Upon close examination it was identified as a subadult female of *Hardella thurjii*. The specimen (Fig. 1) had a dark-brown carapace with grey-black keel, costo-marginal juncture marked with an orange-yellow band; plastron yellow with a large black blotch on each scute; head covered with four yellow stripes: (i) on top of the head, (ii) from above the ear-drum and eye up to the snout, (iii) from below the eye to the nostrils, and (iv) on the angle of jaws.

The water bodies in Harni are being reduced in area and degraded by artificial alterations, due to the modifications and developments carried out by local urban development authority (Vyas 2015). Due to the proximity of these wetlands to the rescue site, we assume that the turtle's origin can be attributed to its seasonal migration from one water body to another. It is also possible that

the specimen reported here might be an escaped individual from a nearby captive facility. Literature surveys reported 16 species of Chelonians in the Gujarat, including an exotic species, but the status of five of them has not been recently evaluated (Patel & Vyas 2019).

Acknowledgements

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Plate 30

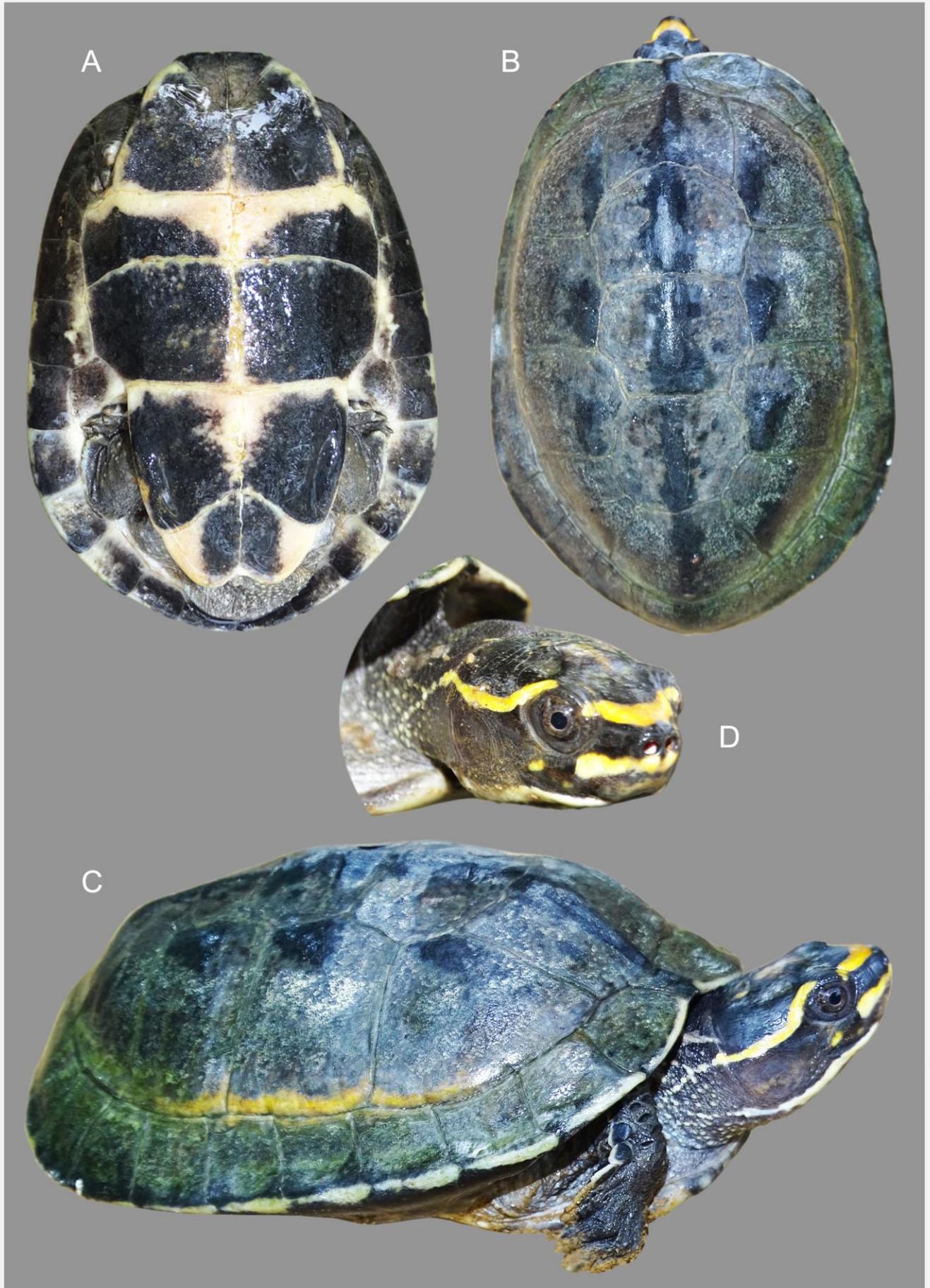


Figure 1. *Hardella thurjii* from Harni, Vadodara, Gujarat, India: (A) plastron, (B) carapace, (C) lateral view of the turtle, and (D) frontolateral view of the head