

### ***Rafetus swinhoei* (Gray, 1873)**

1. *Rafetus swinhoei* is a unique and critically endangered softshell turtle. Its distribution includes the lower Yangtze basin in China and the Red River basin in southern Yunnan and northern Vietnam.
2. It is without doubt the world's most endangered turtle. No confirmed wild populations are known and only five individuals are known in captivity.
3. This turtle has been extensively confused with other softshell turtles, in particular large softshells in the genus *Pelochelys*. All the specimens in Chinese zoos and museums have been erroneously identified as *Pelochelys bibroni*.
4. In order to establish a captive breeding program for this species- it is important to locate more living individuals that may now be in zoos, private collections, or accidentally captured by fishermen.

#### **Identification:**

- A very large, heavily-built softshell with a solid blunt head. Carapace length to 80-110 cm or more, Wt 52-67 kg, possibly up to 100-180 kg.
- Large adults have a nearly smooth carapace, younger and subadult animals may bear several series of low bumps curving over and around the underlying bony carapace, being most prominent over the hip region. The anterior margin of the carapace is smooth. The large head is heavy-set, proportionally deep, and has a remarkably short, broad and fleshy proboscis.
- Subadult animals are dark olive to brown or black dorsally with numerous bold yellow dots and dashes on the head, neck and carapace, and smaller, less obvious speckling on the limbs and soft skin. This pattern becomes less distinct with growth, and in adults the head and neck bear fine yellow-green specks and squiggles, sometimes coalescing into small complex markings, on a near-black underground, like lichen on rock; the carapace and limbs become near-uniform olive-grey.
- The undersurfaces of throat, plastron and limbs are mainly uniform dark grey but irregular, roughly symmetrical areas of yellow may be present on the plastron.

#### **Similar Species:**

- Extensively confused with *Pelochelys* softshells in the literature, which differ greatly by their smaller, flatter head, flat body shape and nearly round carapace outline. The *Pelochelys* from China have been previously referred to as *P. bibroni* but the correct name is *P. cantori*.

RAFETUS SWINHOEI	PELOCHELYS CANTORI
Disc length to 110 cm	Disc length less than 80 cm
Head deep when viewed from side	Head very flattened
Eyes large, located towards top of head	Eyes very small, on sides of head
Body shape oval, much longer than wide	Overall shape circular
Neck distinct from carapace	Base of neck very thick, front edge of carapace indistinct
Snout short, thick, pig-like	Snout projection extremely short and thin
Juveniles heavily spotted, adults slightly so	Little or no spotting

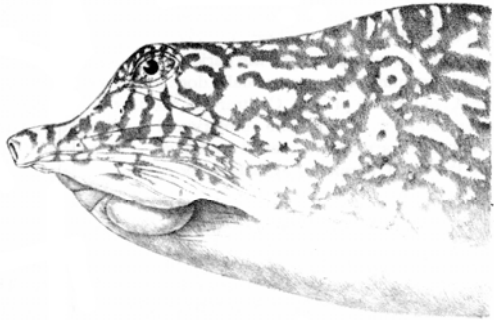
- Superficially similar to *Nilssonia formosa* and *Amyda cartilaginea*, which both possess a row of large tubercles on the anterior carapace margin as well as a more triangular outline to the snout, while *Nilssonia* usually also shows bold eye-spots on the carapace.
- *Pelodiscus sinensis* and *Palea steindachneri* are substantially smaller, have a narrower head with distinct long narrow proboscis, and differ in details of color pattern (these two species are mostly grey, with at most some dark spots on the carapace, and more or less dark-edged white or yellow spots and band on the throat and neck) .

## *Pelochelys*



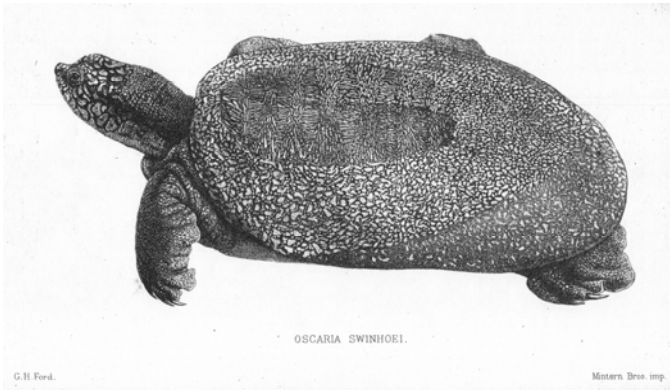
# Rafetus

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*C. Rathouis del. et lith.*

*Imp. Miss. Cath.*



OSCARIA SWINHOLEI.

G. H. Ford.

Motern Bros. imp.

***Amyda cartilaginea***

Note triangular outline of snout and very distinct tubercles at front of shell above the neck.



***Nilssonina formosa***

Note distinct tubercles at front of shell, flatter and more triangular head than *Rafetus*, and different color pattern



***Pelodiscus sinensis***

(and *Pelodiscus maackii*, *P. axenaria* and *P. parviformis*)

Note small overall size, narrow and strongly pointed head, and absence of bold spotted or reticulating pattern on head, neck and carapace, as well as symmetrical plastron markings in juveniles



***Palea steindachneri***

Note tubercular skin patch on either side of neck, rough carapace surface, strongly pointed head and snout, and bold yellow neck stipe in juvenile animals

