

Indian Freshwater Turtles

Part 1

What is a Turtle? A turtle is a reptile with

- a body covered with a hard shell,
- a toothless mouth and
- a reputation for being sloooooow.

But not all turtles are slow!

- only the tortoises, which live on dry land, are slow;
- some water-living ones - turtles or terrapins - can be very fast swimmers.

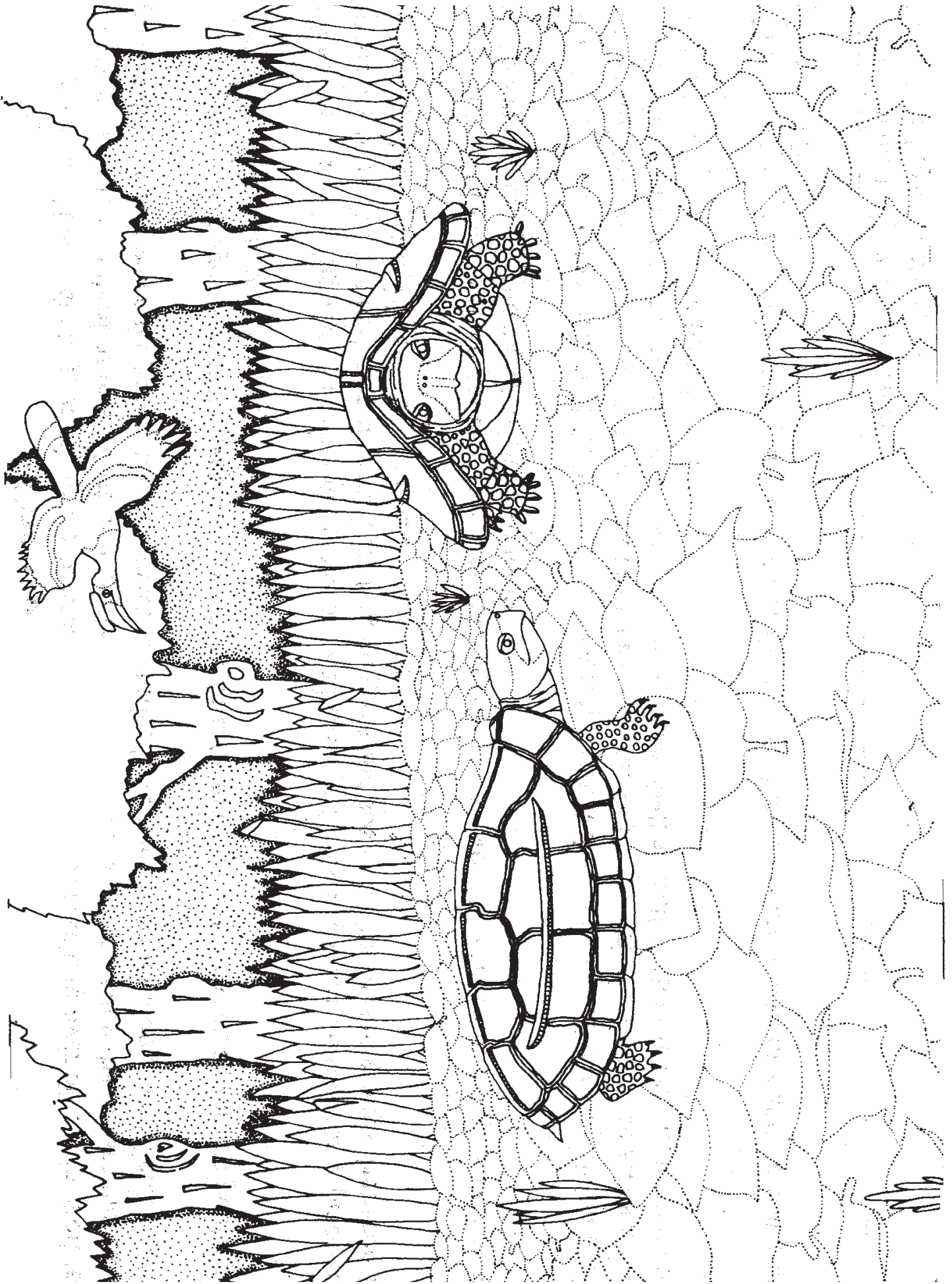
Most people call these shelled animals 'turtles' but now you know better there are turtles, tortoises and terrapins. This little booklet is about a few kinds of turtles, tortoises and terrapins that are found in our rivers and ponds, some rare ones as well as some you are most likely to see.

Sadly, most kinds of turtles are now in danger because of human beings - people still catch them for food, and many thousands are sold in markets. People use turtles in making medicines, and for making tourist souvenirs.

Another reason they are in danger is the clearing of forests to make way for cultivation, housing, or for timber. Insect poisons used to protect farm crops wash into rivers and ponds, where turtles live, can also kill them. People destroy turtle homes by removing sand from the banks of rivers, where turtles nest. Human-made banks along rivers stop turtles from moving from one place to another.

Turtles, tortoises and terrapins need help from human beings who care about animals. We need to make sure we don't do anything to hurt turtles, and to stop other people from doing so.

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Cochin forest cane turtle

Vijayachelys silvatica (Henderson, 1912)

Endangered
globally

Cochin forest cane turtle is found only in the Western Ghats. We say animals found only in a particular area are “endemic” to that area. It lives on the floor of the forests, among dead leaves, fallen logs and under large rocks.

This turtle is i) the smallest turtle ii) full grown, it will fit on your palm iii) not larger than 13 cm in shell length iv) the males head turns bright red during breeding season v) females head remains grey throughout the year.

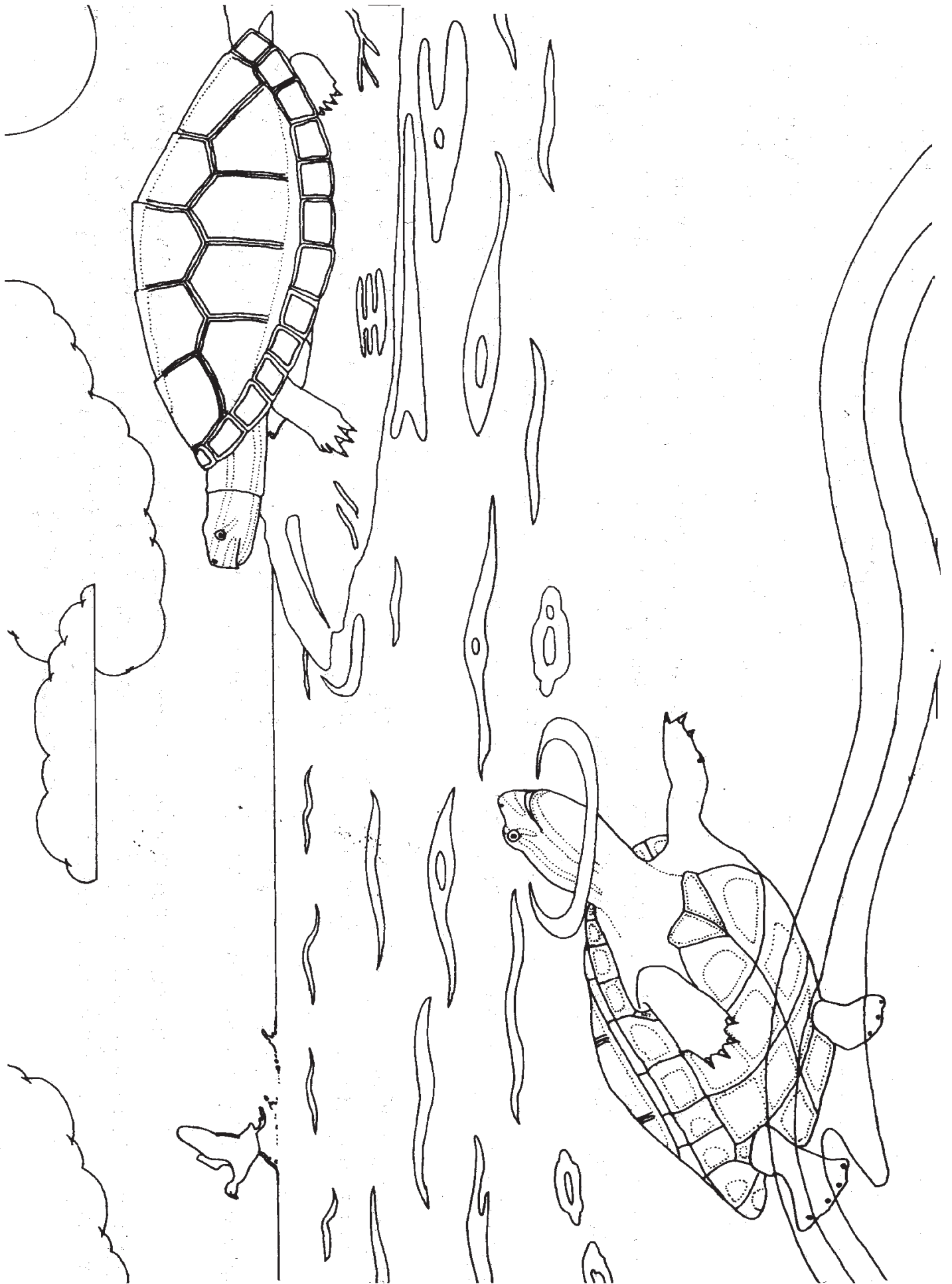
Cochin forest cane turtle has large, bug-shaped eyes which help it see in the dark. We say animals that are active in the dark are “nocturnal”. It eats mainly millipedes. The female lays 2 eggs at a time during the winter.

DANGER: Tree felling for timber, or to make way for dams and housing has affected this turtle which lives only in dense rain forests. Local tribes also eat it. They use dogs to hunt it.

Colouring Instruction: Colour both male and female grey. The top of the head of the male is black, the rest of the head red. The head of the female is grey.

Local names:

**Kadar: Sengkanian; Kannada: Bettadha aame;
Katumaran: Churel aamai; Tamil: Vengal amai**



Crowned river turtle

Hardella thurjii (Gray, 1831)

**Vulnerable
globally**

Crowned river turtle is found in the Brahmaputra, Ganga and Indus rivers, and in pools, ponds, canals and ox-bow lakes in their vicinity.

This turtle is i) the largest turtle ii) females shell can be 60cm long iii) males shell are about 20cm long iv) young turtles have a bright orange/yellow band around their shell but not when they grow up v) all turtles have orange stripes along their faces.

This water-loving turtle seldom comes on land unless it wants to lay eggs and to look for a place to live when the ponds dry up.

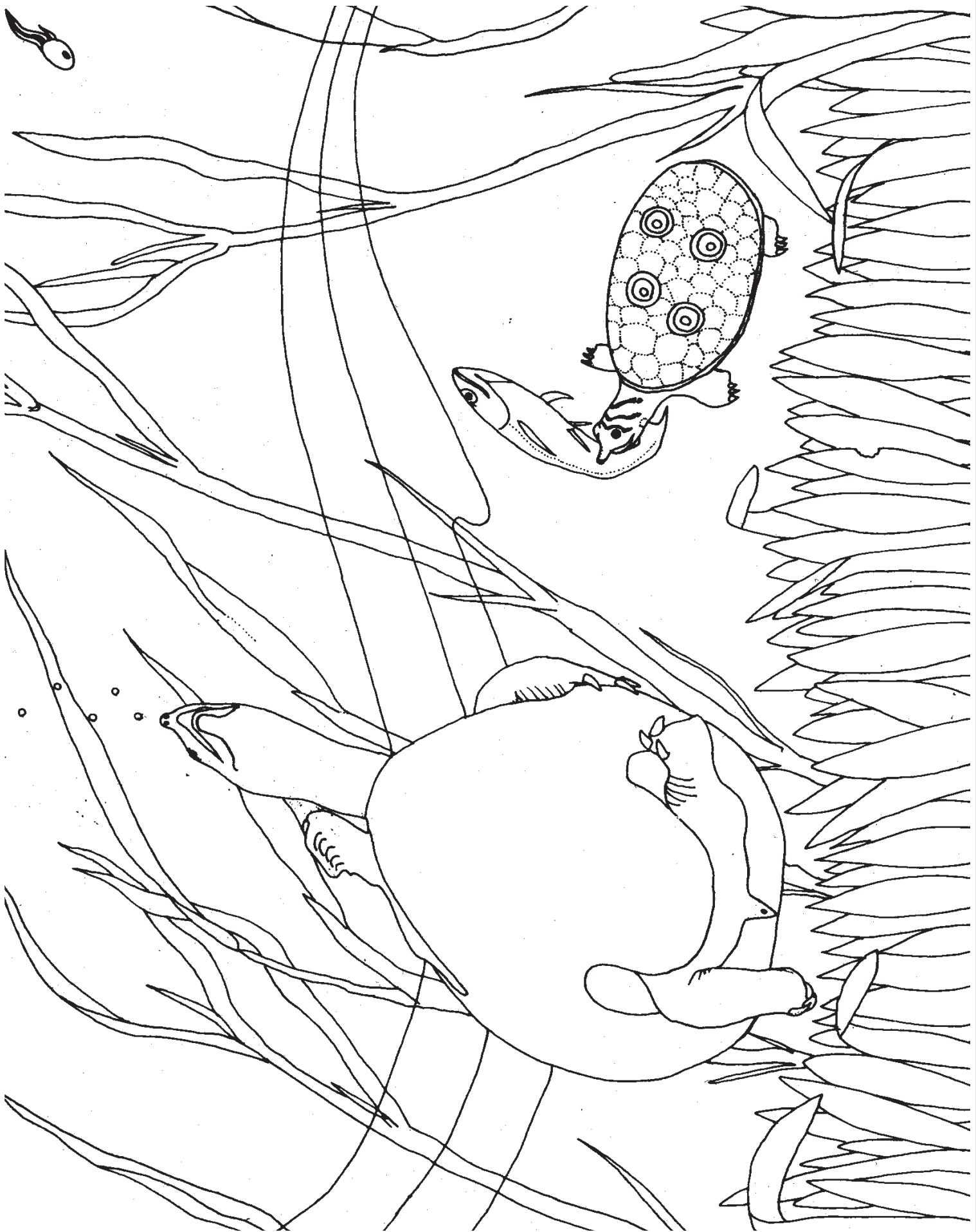
This turtle is herbivorous - it eats grass and sedge. It lays from 14-19 eggs at a time in winter during a time of low water-level.

DANGER: Human-built dams, stop the crowned river turtle from moving. Pollution of our rivers poisons it. Humans catch too many of this turtle for food.

Colouring Instruction: Colour the shell dark brown, but leave a ring, around the shell which can be filled with orange. The head is dark brown as well, although the stripes on the face are orange. The undershell (bottom) is yellow, except the square areas, which are black.

Local names:

Bengali: *Boro katha/ Kali katha*



Indian softshell turtle

Nilssonia gangetica (Cuvier, 1825)

Vulnerable
globally

Indian softshell turtle is found in Ganga, Indus and Mahanadi Rivers and their tributaries, ponds and lakes near these rivers, buried in the mud.

This turtle has i) a pig-nose ii) soft leathery shell iii) black lines on the forehead iv) legs that are not protected by a flap of skin v) shell length of 94cm.

This is a ferocious turtle and can bite hard, so don't ever pick one up. Feeds on both plants and animals, including insects, snails, fishes, frogs, and even ducks! It will also eat dead animals on land. Can lay 8-32 eggs at a time, on the shores of waterbodies.

DANGER: Many thousands are caught every year for food as it is a favourite for eating. Development of rivers and creation of dams as well as pollution are threats.

Colouring Instruction: The little turtle on the right has four eye-like markings to scare enemies. Colour the rings and the spot in the centre black. The shell, head and legs can be coloured green. The underside of the shell of the adult on the left is yellowish, the head and neck green.

Local names:

Bengali: *Ganga kachim/Kholua*; **Gujarati:** *Moti kachab*; **Hindi:** *Khatawa*; **Oriya:** *Bada pani kaichha*