

Indian Freshwater Turtles

Conservation / Threat Status of Turtles

Many turtles, terrapins and tortoises are threatened with extinction, that is, dying out completely. Listed below are the turtles discussed in this article (from Part 1 to 3), with their status, or prospects of survival.

Name	Status (Global)
Assam Roofed Turtle	Endangered
Cochin Forest Cane Turtle	Endangered
Crowned River Turtle	Vulnerable
Rock Terrapin	Near Threatened
Indian Flapshell Turtle	Least Concern
Indian Softshell Turtle	Vulnerable
Indian Narrow-headed Softshell Turtle	Endangered
Red-crowned Roofed Turtle	Critically Endangered
Northern River Terrapin	Critically Endangered

THE CATEGORIES

Critically Endangered -- This is the highest category that a species can be assigned before “extinction”. It represents a “last ditch” effort to provide a warning to wildlife agencies and governments to activate management measures to protect the species before it disappears from the face of the earth. When a species is Critically Endangered, usually its chances of living for the next 100 years are very low. Often, its chances of surviving even for 10 years are not good at all !

Endangered -- This is the second highest threat category that a species can be assigned before it becomes further threatened e.g. Critically Endangered or Extinct. When a species is Endangered, its chances of survival as a species for the next 100 years are low.

Vulnerable -- The IUCN Red List defines Vulnerable as when a species is not Critically Endangered or Endangered, but is still facing a high risk of extinction in the wild. This is the first threat category for ranking a species when it has some serious problems from human-related threats. When a species is Vulnerable, it means that precautionary measures have to be taken to keep the species from becoming more threatened.

Non-threatened categories -- There are several non-threatened categories in the IUCN Red List. They include species that are already Extinct, or species that are not yet threatened. If a species is widely distributed in large numbers and has no threats, then it is ranked “Least Concern”.

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Indian Narrow-headed Softshell Turtle



Indian Narrow-headed Softshell Turtle

Chitra indica (Gray, 1830)

**Endangered
globally**

Narrow-headed Softshell Turtle is found in many rivers, including the Ganga, Godavari, Indus, Mahanadi, Padma and even Coleroon in southern India. It prefers sandy sections of rivers.

This turtle has i) eyes so close to the tip of the head that it looks funny ii) a shell covered with skin, and a pig-like nose iii) a shell that is over 1 meter long iv) may lay 65-187 eggs at a time, close to the river bank.

Narrow-headed Softshell Turtle hunts in ambush, burying itself in the sand and striking fishes as they approach, as shown by the adult turtle on the right that has just caught a fish. Small fishes are sucked in whole!.

DANGER: It is caught for food using hooks and nests. Pollution of rivers and dams are other reasons why this turtle is getting rare.

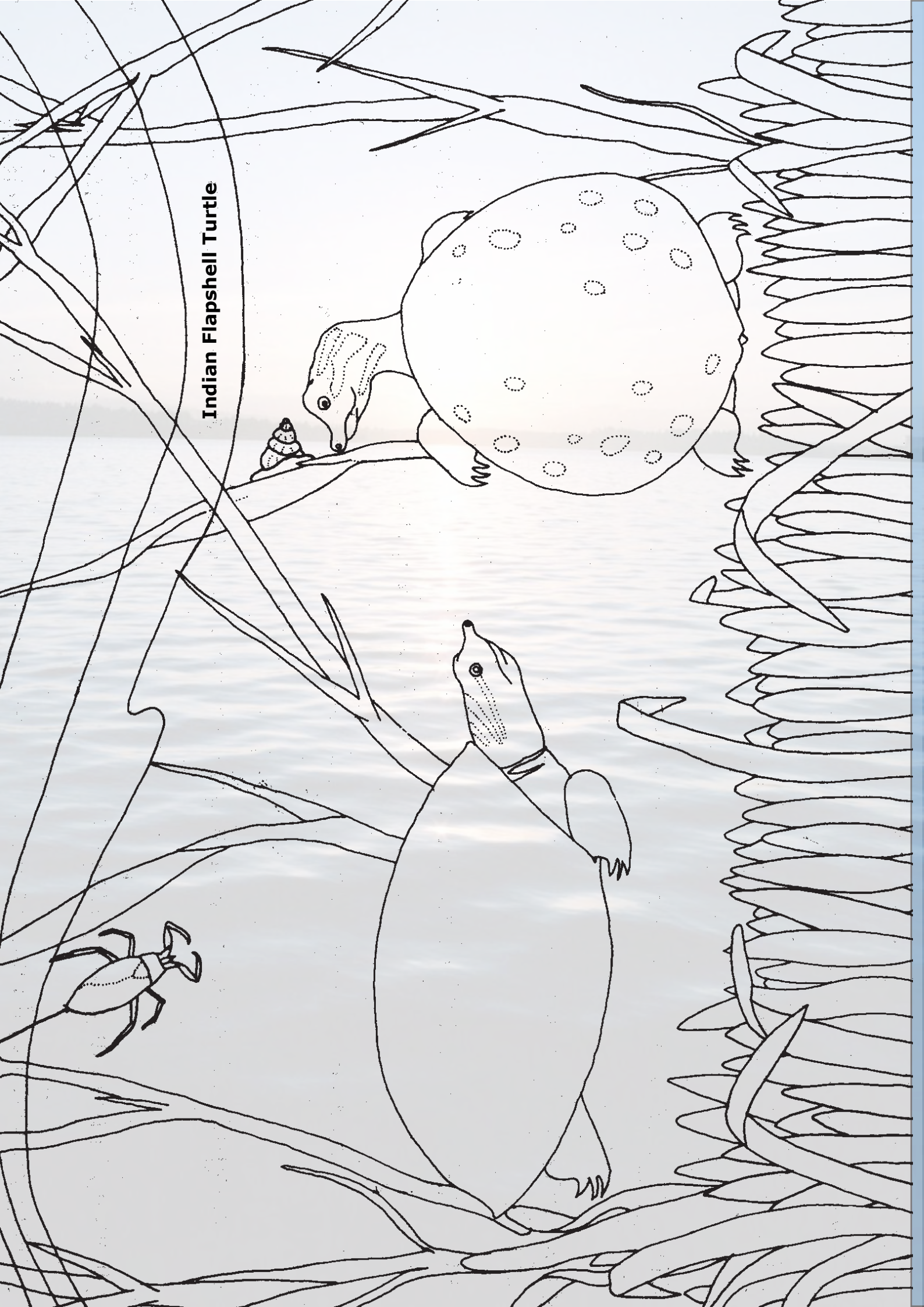
Colouring Instruction: The head of the turtle on the right grey, leaving yellow lines along the face. The baby turtle has large areas of grey, with smaller areas of yellow, on the shell, while the head and legs are grey.

Local names:

Bengali: *Chitra/Chhim*; **Hindi:** *Chitra/Seem*;

Oriya: *Balera katchha*

Indian Flapshell Turtle



Indian Flapshell Turtle

Lissemys punctata (Lacépède, 1788)

Least Concern
globally

Indian Flapshell Turtle is found all over India and some countries of South Asia - Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka - as well as in Myanmar (Burma) in rice fields, forest ponds, rivers and reservoirs.

This turtle has i) a skin flap under which the legs can be tucked in ii) a shell covered with skin iii) a pig-like nose iv) may lay 2-14 eggs v) small turtle, only 37cm in shell length vi) northern Indian variety tends to have yellow spots on its shell and face, unlike that from the south.

Indian Flapshell Turtle survives in many areas because it can live in human habitations. Eats plants as well as insects, snails and fishes.

DANGER: Too many are now being caught for food, for making medicine and even for cleaning wells having insects.

Colouring Instruction: Left turtle is from southern India with green shell, head and legs green and black stripes on head. Right turtle is from northern India with green shell and yellow spots on the dotted areas. Head and legs are green as well; lines on face are yellow.

Local names:

Assamese: *Bagh dura/Baminy kasso*; **Bengali:** *Chiti kachim/Sundhi*; **Gujarati:** *Pani no kachbo*; **Hindi:** *Matia/Sundri*; **Kannada:** *Bili aame*; **Oriya:** *Panka kaichha*; **Tamil:** *Pal aamai*; **Telugu:** *Neeti tabelu*

Northern River Terrapin



Northern River Terrapin

Batagur baska (Gray, 1830)

**Critically
Endangered
globally**

Northern River Terrapin is found in India and Bangladesh, in mangrove forests, where the river meets the sea.

This turtle has i) an upturned nose ii) very smooth shell iii) 4 claws instead of 5 iv) a 60 cm long shell v) lays between 5-60 eggs each.

Northern River Terrapin comes on land only to lay eggs. The adults feed only on fruits and leaves of certain plants. Some baby turtles also eat a prawn or a fish. Nesting is often with other turtles. The upturned nose probably allows River Terrapin to be underwater with very little of its body showing outside as it sticks its nose out to breathe. This keeps it safe from its enemies.

DANGER: Destruction of mangrove forests and removal of sands from sea beaches. Many turtles were caught for making turtle soup in Kolkata earlier.

Colouring Instruction: Colour the shell brown or greengrey. Males and females have different coloured heads. The female (in front) has a brown head, the male (at the back) has a red head.

Local names:

Bengali: *Bala Katha/Boro Ketho/Ram Kachim/Pora Katha/Bali Katha/Sono Katha/Sundhi*

Fantastic Facts

Questions

(All answers are in this article - read all the parts from 1 to 3)

1. Which turtle has a “pug” nose and 4 claws instead of 5 ?

2. Which is the most ferocious turtle that you should never pick up ?

3. Of most of the Indian freshwater turtles, which are usually bigger ... males or females ? _____
4. Which turtle is found ONLY in the river Ganga ?

5. Which turtle uses its bad smell as a defense ?

6. What is the largest Indian freshwater turtle ?

7. Which turtle back is like a roof, or pyramid ?

8. Which turtle’s shell is covered with skin and eyes are very close together

9. What is the smallest turtle ? _____
10. Which 3 turtles have pig-like noses ?

Math lesson ... if you put all the turtles together, adding only their average shell length as described in this booklet, how long would your line of turtles be ?



Fantastic Facts

Further Reading

Bangladesher Bonnyoprani. Vol. 1 Uvachar O Sarisrip by Mohammed Ali Reza Khan. Bangla Academy, Dhaka, Bangladesh. 1987. (In Bengali).

Indian Turtles: A field guide by Indraneil Das. World Wildlife Fund- India (Eastern Region), Calcutta, India. 1985.

The World of the turtles and Crocodiles by Romulus, Zai Whitaker and Indraneil Das. National Book Trust, New Delhi, India. 1993.

Turtles and Tortoises of India by Indraneil Das. Oxford University Press, Bombay, India, 1995.

Encyclopedia of Turtles by Peter Pritchard. T.F.H. Publications, Neptune, New Jersey, USA. 1979.

- Answers for the questions**
1. Northern River Terrapin, *Batagur baska*
 2. Indian Softshell turtle, *Nilssonia gangetica*
 3. Females
 4. Red-crowned Roofed Turtle, *Batagur kachuga*
 5. Rock Terrapin, *Melanochelys trijuga*
 6. Crowned River Turtle, *Hardella thurjii*
 7. Assam Roofed Turtle, *Pangshura sylhetensis*
 8. Narrow-headed Softshell Turtle, *Chitra indica*
 9. Cochlin Forest Cane Turtle, *Vijayachelys silvatica*
 10. Narrow-headed Softshell Turtle, *Chitra indica*; Indian Flapshell Turtle, *Lissemys punctata*, Indian Softshell Turtle, *Nilssonia gangetica*
- Math: if we put all the turtles together, adding only their average shell length as described in this booklet, then your line of turtles would be 501 cms (197 inches)

