

OBSERVATIONS ON *TESTUDO NIGRITA*, DUM. & BIBR.

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(Plates xx., xxi., and xxii.)

UNTIL recently, living in the grounds of the Hospital at Gladesville, near Sydney, were two Gigantic Land Tortoises. In April, 1896, I availed myself of a long-standing invitation from Dr. Eric Sinclair to inspect these tortoises with a view of determining the species and to verify, if possible, the common belief that the larger of the two originally came from the Galapagos Islands, the home of one of the three races of gigantic land tortoises.

I then understood that little or nothing was known of the history of these huge Chelonians; it was therefore, in the first place, necessary to determine the species. An examination showed that although the two individuals differed slightly, attributable to their being of opposite sex, they were of the same species. The absence of a nuchal plate, together with a divided gular, and the presence of an enlarged scute on the inner side of the fore-limb, at once indicated that they were from the Galapagos Islands. Of the six species inhabiting the group, three only have the shields of the carapace concentrically striated, as exhibited by our specimens. The anterior declivity of the carapace, taken in conjunction with the feature of the plastron, namely, being deeply notched behind, at once enables us to determine the species as:—

*TESTUDO NIGRITA, Dum. & Bib.**

I had hoped to fully describe the species, and so close a gap in our knowledge of the several forms; pressure of work has hitherto prevented my doing so, and, notwithstanding the facilities we possess in the way of material, I cannot look forward to sufficient leisure at any near date. The male is now in London, but is still, I believe, alive, so that its osteological characters are not ascertainable. The female died in August, 1896, and then passed into the possession of the Museum. Being desirous of preserving it in a life-like condition, and at the same time not wishing to sacrifice such a valuable skeleton, a novel experiment was tried and proved to be most successful. Casts were taken of the carapace, plastron, and head; the skin was next carefully removed, and so worked up in conjunction with the casts that no one could now detect the deception, and the production occupies a

* Duméril et Bibron—Erpét. Génér., ii., 1835, p. 80.