

**Inclusion of the following six species of the Family Trionychidae in Appendix II:  
*Cyclanorbis elegans*, *Cyclanorbis senegalensis*, *Cycloderma aubryi*,  
*Cycloderma frenatum*, *Trionyx triunguis*, and *Rafetus euphraticus***

**Proponents: Burkina Faso, Chad, Gabon, Guinea, Liberia, Mauritania, Nigeria, Togo, and United States of America**

**Summary:** Softshell turtles belonging to the Family of Trionychidae are highly aquatic species that generally prefer slow-moving water with muddy or sandy bottoms. Currently some 33 species in 13 genera are recognised. Three species occur in North America, six in Africa, the Mediterranean and the Middle East, and the remainder in more eastern parts of Asia. With the exception of the widely farmed *Pelodiscus sinensis*, the eastern Asian species are all variously included in either Appendix I or Appendix II. One North American subspecies, *Apalone spinifera atra*, is included in Appendix I. This proposal seeks to add all Trionychidae native to Africa, the Mediterranean and the Middle East to Appendix II.

Most softshell turtles reach maturity at 10 to 15 years old, and may live for 60 years or more. They may lay several clutches a year of 10 to 100 eggs (depending on the species) but few reach maturity.

Softshell turtles are in generally very difficult to survey and there is virtually no quantitative information on overall populations, population densities or trends for any of the species. For species that are used there is in almost all cases no market information to indicate changes in supply or in rates of use. Changes in population have sometimes been inferred from habitat changes or evidence of use, but appear often to be based on supposition.

***Cyclanorbis elegans*** is known from wide rivers with muddy substrate in disjunct locations in the Sahel zone of sub-Saharan Africa. The species is difficult to distinguish from *C. senegalensis*. It has rarely been recorded in surveys. Known international trade is at an extremely low level. Collection of turtle eggs for consumption occurs within its range and changes in water management may affect its habitat, although there is no information on the impact of either of these. Classified by IUCN as Lower Risk/near threatened (1996 – needs updating)<sup>1</sup>.

***Cyclanorbis senegalensis*** is widespread in West Africa and found in a range of aquatic habitats<sup>2</sup>. Some populations are reported as harvested, with an inference that this is leading to declines; other, unharvested populations reportedly remain abundant. Known international trade, presumed for the international pet trade, is at a very low level. Trade data indicate 70 live specimens were imported into the USA between 2005 and 2013, 54 of which were recorded as wild-sourced<sup>3</sup>. More than 50 live specimens were reported as exported from Togo in 2013<sup>4</sup>. In the past, this species has been exported under the name of *Trionyx triunguis* from Togo<sup>4</sup>. Classified by IUCN as Lower Risk/near threatened (1996 – needs updating)<sup>5</sup>.

***Cycloderma aubryi*** occurs in waterways in rainforests in central Africa. Reported to be collected extensively for local consumption which is inferred as having led to declines. Trade data records the import of negligible numbers (20 between 2007 and 2013) into the USA<sup>3</sup>.

***Cycloderma frenatum*** occurs chiefly in Malawi but extends into Mozambique, United Republic of Tanzania and Zimbabwe. It is reportedly common in the shallow southern waters of Lake Malawi, rare in the deeper northern waters. Historically this species has been collected for consumption across much of its range, but in some areas only eggs are consumed. Until recently the level of harvest was not thought to have a significant impact on the population. In 2013 an illegal butchery was shut down in Malawi. This had reportedly been processing up to 50 individuals a day in an area where it has not traditionally been consumed apparently to meet demand from Asian nationals in Malawi. Trade data records imports into the USA of 52 live specimens between 2008 and 2013, 50 of which were in 2013<sup>3</sup>. Classified by IUCN as Lower risk/near threatened (1996 – needs updating)<sup>6</sup>.

***Trionyx triunguis*** inhabits fresh and brackish waters across Africa, and around the eastern Mediterranean. It is a large species, growing up to 80cm carapace length. It is best known from its Mediterranean populations which are generally believed to be declining. Populations in Africa are less well known; there is anecdotal evidence of major decline in catch per unit effort in parts of West Africa. Populations in central Africa are suspected to be declining at a low rate because of harvest. In Egypt, there have been no recent records from the Nile below Lake Nasser but is reportedly considered abundant upstream of the dam. The species is believed to be affected by habitat alteration and incidental catch in nets. It is consumed for

subsistence in parts of its range; its shells are sold in fetish markets in Togo and Benin<sup>7</sup>. In Israel the species is regarded as highly threatened, with the largest subpopulation believed to comprise some 50 individuals. Illegal harvest for local consumption has been identified as a threat. Trade data show a very small number imported as live specimens into the USA (ca. 100 declared as wild in 2004-2013 in total<sup>3</sup>).

***Rafetus euphraticus*** is a little known species from Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey. It is reported to now be rare in Turkey, but has been reported as very abundant in marshes in Iraq. Habitat in Iraq had been reduced by draining but some has now been restored. Habitat degradation, pollution and killing by fishermen have been identified as factors affecting the species. It is not harvested for meat but parts of it are reportedly consumed for medicinal purposes in some of its range. There is no evidence of international trade. Classified by IUCN as Endangered (1996 – needs updating)<sup>8</sup>.

Softshell turtles are heavily exploited in Asia. Demand, primarily for human food consumption and also traditional medicine, is not species-specific. The main parts in trade (meat and shell processed to varying degrees) are generally extremely difficult to identify to species level in the form in which they are traded.

**Analysis:** Information on all six species is generally scarce. Although declines in some parts of the range of some species have been reported, in no case is there any indication of major species-wide declines. There is not known to be any significant level of international trade at present in any of the species. Where any information on harvest is available, it is evident that this is largely or entirely for domestic consumption. It does not appear that any of the species meets the criteria for inclusion in Appendix II in Annex 2 a of Res. Conf. 9.24 (Rev. CoP16).

Species of softshell turtle in trade resemble each other in the parts in which they are mainly traded. However, known trade routes for these products from Appendix-II listed species of softshell are currently almost entirely within eastern Asia; they do not originate in or pass through the range States of any of the species proposed here. There is no evidence to date to indicate that trade is taking place to Asia. It would appear therefore that none of these species meets the criteria for inclusion in Appendix II in Annex 2 b of Res. Conf. 9.24 (Rev. CoP16) (lookalike criteria).

**Reviewers:** P.P. van Dijk and G. Segniagbeto.

#### References:

Information not referenced in the Summary section is from the Supporting Statement.

<sup>1</sup> Tortoise & Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group (1996) *Cyclanorbis elegans*. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 1996.

<sup>2</sup> Trape, J.-F., Trape, S. and Chirio, L. (2012) *Lézards, crocodiles et tortues d'Afrique occidentale et du Sahara*. IRD Editions, Marseille.

<sup>3</sup> Analysis of US Fish & Wildlife Service Law Enforcement Management Information System (LEMIS) data, May 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Segniagbeto, G. H., Bour, R., Ohler, A., Dubois, A., Roedel M-O., Trape, J-F., Fretey, J., Petrozzi, F. Aïdam A. and Luiselli, L. A. (2014) Turtles and tortoises of Togo: historical data, distribution, ecology and conservation. *Chelonian Conservation and Biology*. 13:152 – 165.

<sup>5</sup> Tortoise & Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group (1996) *Cyclanorbis senegalensis*. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 1996.

<sup>6</sup> Tortoise & Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group (1996) *Cycloderma frenatum*. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 1996.

<sup>7</sup> Segniagbeto, G. H., Petrozzi, F. Aïdam, A. & Luiselli L. (2013) Reptiles traded in the fetish market of Lomé, Togo (West Africa). *Herpetological Conservation and Biology*: 8:400-408.

<sup>8</sup> European Reptile & Amphibian Specialist Group (1996) *Rafetus euphraticus*. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 1996.