

LANDINGS OF *DERMOCHELYS CORIACEA* LINN. (REPTILIA, DERMOCHELIDAE) IN MALTA (CENTRAL MEDITERRANEAN)

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ABSTRACT

The Leathery Turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea* Linn.) has not previously featured in Maltese herpetological literature. Nevertheless a considerable number of landings many of which have been reported in the local press, have been made in recent years. These landings are reviewed here.

Previous writers on Malta's herpetology, including the Testudines, have not included the Leathery Turtle, *Dermochelys coriacea* Linn., presumably as none were recorded as taken from Maltese waters. During the past decade, however, the following landings were made:

1970 - 5th August; Żurrieq (South Malta); 1.98 m long, approximately 340 kg. Taken to Maltaquarium but died of its wounds two days later (Ref. 1, 2, 3, 7, 10, 11).

1972 - 22nd March; Żurrieq; 1.40 m long, approximately 101 kg (ref. 8).

1975 - 9th October; The Strand, Sliema (NE Malta); details not available (Ref. 12).

1976 - 13th May; Marsaxlokk (SE Malta); no details available (Ref. 4, 13).

3rd July; off Filfla (islet south of Malta); captured by Marsaxlokk fishermen and taken to the Natural History Museum at Mdina for preservation. Mr. J. Vella-Gaffiero, Officer in Charge, informed me that it was approximately 1.95 m long and weighing 300 kg. An attempt was made to mount it, but in July 1977 it was in a very bad state of preservation (Ref. 5, 14).

9th November; Gozo (island NW of Malta); 1.85 m long. It was taken to the University of Malta where skeletal material and some internal organs are still preserved (information supplied by Rev. Dr. Victor Jaccarini of the Biology Department of the University).

1977 - 3rd June; Spinola (NE Malta); dead specimen 1.85 m long (Ref. 15). On inspecting specimen, the present writer removed some of the barnacles adhering to the folds of the skin at the base of the neck, limbs and tail. These were identified by Dr. G. A. Boxhall of the British Museum (Natural History) as *Stomatolepas elegans* Costa, (Ref. 16), who further informed me that its normal host is the Leathery Turtle and its distribution is therefore dependent on that of the turtle. Some examples of *Dermochelys coriacea* taken elsewhere in the Mediterranean had been accompanied by *Echeneis remora* Linn. or by *Naucrates ductor* Linn. (Ref. 6, 9) both fish usually associated with large marine animals.

13th July; Marsaxlokk; no details available. Mr. J. Vella-Gaffiero of the Natural History Museum, Mdina, confirmed its capture.

In conclusion may I add that this turtle is not edible and efforts should be made by the fishing authorities to discourage its aimless destruction.

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