

NOTE XXIII.

THALASSOCHELYS CARETTA ON THE DUTCH COAST

BY

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In the end of December 1894 a living specimen of *Thalassochelys caretta* L. was captured near the village of Oud-dorp on the island of Overflakkee. Though this species is an inhabitant of the tropical and subtropical seas, living also in the Mediterranean, it is an accidental visitor of the North.

Mr. Edm. de Selys-Longchamps, speaking about *Chelonia caretta*, mentions: »Elle a été pêchée deux fois à Blankenberg sur la côte de Flandre, mais elle ne s'y trouve que très-accidentellement" ¹⁾. Fuller information as to the date of capture, or the sex and the dimensions of the captured animals is wanting. According to P. J. van Beneden two Cheloniidae were captured in November and May 1859 by fishermen of Ostende ²⁾.

On the first of August 1861 a Loggerhead Turtle (*Chelonia caretta*) was caught at Pennan, near Banff, by fishermen in a stake net and was recorded to have been very lively and pugnacious. This specimen had a weight of 25 lbs, whilst its shield measured 19¹/₂ by 18 inches. Another specimen, 11¹/₂ inches long and 10 inches broad, was caught in August 1861 in fresh water, viz. in Loch Lomond, as recorded by Mr. A. D. Smee in a letter to Dr. J. E. Gray ³⁾.

In 1707 in our country also a *Chelonia* of about 6 feet long was captured in fresh water, in the Wijkermeer near the village of Beverwijk, as is recorded in the »Kronyk" of the town of Medemblik. In this case we are not sure as to the species the marine turtle belonged to, nor have we any certainty about the species of a very large specimen captured on 17 August 1777 near the island of Walcheren.

1) E. de Selys Longchamps, Faune Belge, 1re Partie. Liège, 1842.

2) Bulletins de l'Académie royale de Belgique. 4e Série, T. VI, p. 71.

3) Annals and Magazine of Natural History, 3rd Ser. Vol. 8, p. 351.

Mr. J. van Iperen who mentions these facts ¹⁾ thinks it improbable that these turtles were washed off the deck of a ship, as he takes them to be too large to be transported.

As far as I know of, the statements of these captures in 1707 and 1777 are the only ones in which the presence of a marine turtle on our coast was recorded.

The question whether Chelonidae captured on the English, Belgian or Dutch coasts must be regarded as accidental visitors, or whether their appearance is due to the influence of traders who transported them from their original habitat to some market or some zoological garden, is a question not so easily solved. Dr. de Man in Middelburg kindly informs me, that in 1889 he got possession of two specimens of a number of three Chelonidae, cast on shore in our province of Zeeland, one of them still living when it was captured. After many accurate informations Dr. de Man discovered that, not long before that time, from a ship that brought animals from America to the zoological garden at Antwerp, three marine turtles, being nearly dead, were thrown overboard. On the other hand; a specimen of *Pelamys sarda* C. & V., captured in June 1878 near Bergen op Zoom, and sent to the Leyden Museum by Mr. C. J. Bottemanne ²⁾, is an example of a species, which, though living in the Atlantic and the Mediterranean, accidentally visits our Northern seas.

Our specimen of *Thalassochelys caretta* L. measured 98 cm. by 77 cm. along and across its shield and had a weight of 280 kilo's. It was a female and contained no less than 1150 eggs in a far advanced stage of development, the largest of them weighing 17,5 gr., the smallest 11 gr., and measuring respectively 3,5 cm. and 2,5 cm. It is more than probable that all these eggs would have been laid during the very next period of egg-laying of our turtle, an interesting fact with regard to the fertility of these animals.

The skeleton of our specimen will be preserved in the collections of the Leyden Museum.

1) Verhandelingen van het Zeeuwsch Genootschap, T. VI, p. 620.

2) Tijdschrift der Ned. Dierk. Vereeniging, Deel IV, 1879. Verslagen p. 8.