



INTRODUCED SPECIES

First Account of a Southeast Asian Box Turtle (*Cuora amboiensis kamarona*) in Florida

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On 14 March 2015, while road cruising Osceola Road in Geneva Florida (28.768921°N, -81.114416°W, Datum WGS84), the senior author noticed a large box turtle crossing the road. When he stopped to help the turtle cross the busy road, he was immediately confused as to its identity. The turtle was still wet from crossing a roadside ditch and exhibited extensive carapace scarring. Photographs were sent to the Division of Herpetology, Florida Museum of Natural History, University of Florida, where Dr. K. Krysko identified the turtle as a large male Southeast Asian or Malayan

Box Turtle (*Cuora amboiensis kamarona*; Fig. 1; UF 178897). Unfortunately, not knowing it was an exotic at the time of capture, Mr. Stanberry released the turtle back into the wild.

No previous records document the presence of this species in Florida. Our photographic voucher thus constitutes not only a Seminole County record but a new introduced species record for the state of Florida (Krysko et al. 2011). Many species of turtles, notably the Red-eared Slider (*Trachemys scripta elegans*) and the Mississippi Map Turtle (*Graptemys pseudogeographica kohnii*), have been widely sold as pets in Florida.



Fig. 1. An adult male Southeast Asian Box Turtle (*Cuora amboiensis kamarona*) found crossing a road in Seminole County, Florida. Photograph by R. Stanberry.

These pets are sometimes released into the wild and subsequently reported from counties across Florida (Krysko et al. 2011). While finding a new non-native species of turtle is rare, Munscher et al. (2012) reported the capture of a Northern Red-bellied Cooter (*Pseudemys rubriventris*) in Florida.

The native range of the Southeast Asian Box Turtle includes but is not limited to eastern India, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, Nicobar Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam (Turtle Taxonomy Working Group 2014). The species is unique in being the only non-marine turtle that occurs naturally on both sides of Wallace's Line, a boundary separating the ecozones of Asia and Wallacea (the transitional zone between Asia and Australia).

Asian Box Turtles in the genus *Cuora* are abundant in the extensive live animal trade. We surmise that the individual encountered in Seminole County was purchased as a pet (they are readily available and affordable) and released due to its size, as Asian Box Turtles can reach carapace lengths of over 20 cm. Note that the turtle in Fig. 1 shows substantial carapace scarring and pits that are suggestive of a prolonged period in the wild. Many of the scars appear to be consistent with predation attempts by an American Alligator (*Alligator mississippiensis*).

Unfortunately, Florida continues to be a place where almost any species of reptile or amphibian can be purchased.

With proximity to cities such as Orlando, Daytona, and Miami, where purchasing exotic species is possible (Kraus 2009), the turtle in question was most likely purchased and later released at some time during the past several years.

Acknowledgements

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Literature Cited

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