

Reprint From:

(ISSN 1071-8443)

CHELONIAN CONSERVATION AND BIOLOGY

International Journal of Turtle and Tortoise Research

Volume 3, Number 4

November 2000

The Identification of the Holotype of *Chelodina oblonga* (Testudines: Chelidae) with a Discussion of Taxonomic Implications

SCOTT THOMSON

Published by
Chelonian Research Foundation

in association with

IUCN/SSC Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group,
IUCN/SSC Marine Turtle Specialist Group,

Chelonian Research Institute, Conservation International, Chelonia Institute, Wildlife Conservation Society,
and IUCN (The World Conservation Union) – Species Survival Commission



The Identification of the Holotype of *Chelodina oblonga* (Testudines: Chelidae) with a Discussion of Taxonomic Implications

SCOTT THOMSON¹

¹Applied Ecology Research Group and CRC for Freshwater Ecology, University of Canberra, Canberra, ACT, 2601, Australia [Fax: 61-2-6201-5305; E-mail: thomson@aerg.canberra.edu.au]

For a stable nomenclature to develop within any group of species it is important that common usage is justified by accurate identification of holotypes. Unfortunately it occurs at times that the holotype represents a species that is not the same as that to which the name has been applied for a considerable time. When mistakes are found corrections should be made in accordance with the rules and guidelines of the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature (ICZN, 1999).

The genus *Chelodina* was described by Fitzinger (1826) to apply to the Australian long-necked turtles with the type species, *Chelodina longicollis* (Shaw, 1794), being the only member at the time. Gray (1841) added *C. oblonga* to this genus. Subsequent early additions to the genus were *C. colliei* (Gray, 1856a), *C. expansa* (Gray, 1857), *C. novaeguineae* (Boulenger, 1888), *C. rugosa* (Ogilby, 1890), and *C. siebenrocki* (Werner, 1901). The two species *C. oblonga* (from "Western Australia") and *C. colliei* (from "Swan River" [Perth, Western Australia]) were maintained as separate species by Gray until his last published work (Gray, 1873). In addition, he assigned turtles subsequently collected in Port Essington, Northern Territory, to his concept of *C. oblonga* (Gray, 1844, 1856b, 1873). However, *C. colliei* was later synonymized under *C. oblonga* by Boulenger (1889) and has not been recognized as distinct since then. Later, *C. rugosa* (from "Cape York") and *C. siebenrocki* (from "Deutsch-Neu-Guinea") were also synonymized under *C. oblonga* by Siebenrock (1909, 1915). This usage persisted in most subsequent Australian literature for the next half century, with all similar-appearing long-necked turtles from northern and western Australia referred to as *C. oblonga*. (e.g., Worrell, 1963). However, Mertens and Wermuth (1955) and Wermuth and Mertens (1961) resurrected the New Guinea species *C. siebenrocki* from the synonymy of Australian *C. oblonga*, and Goode (1967), recognizing that northern Australian long-necked turtles were in fact very similar to the New Guinean *C. siebenrocki*, then utilized that name (erroneously) for the northern Australian form and restricted usage of the name *C. oblonga* to the southwestern Australian form from Perth. Cogger and Lindner (1974) and Burbidge et al. (1974) then corrected Goode's usage by resurrecting the earlier name *C. rugosa* instead of *C.*

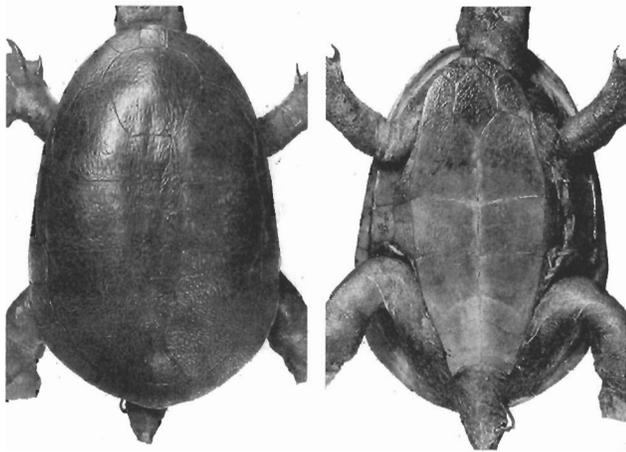


Figure 1. Dorsal and ventral views of the holotype of *Chelodina oblonga* (BMNH 1947.3.5.89)

siebenrocki for the northern Australian form. Since then, major field guides such as Cogger (1975, 1979, 1983, 1985, 1992), checklists and catalogues such as Iverson (1985, 1992) and Cogger et al. (1983) and numerous journal papers have utilized the name *C. rugosa* for the northern Australian form. *Chelodina siebenrocki*, if valid at all (it may be synonymous with *C. rugosa*), is restricted to New Guinea (Rhodin and Mittermeier, 1976).

Current prevailing usage for 33 years since 1967 has the restricted name *Chelodina oblonga* referring to the isolated long-necked turtle endemic to the southwest corner of Western Australia in Perth; a population which represents a valid species (Burbidge et al., 1974; Georges and Adams, 1992). The same prevailing usage for 26 years since 1974 has the name *Chelodina rugosa* referring to the long-necked turtles ranging from Cape York across northern Australia to Northern Territory and northern Western Australia. The name *Chelodina colliei*, originally used for the Perth

population, has not been used for over 111 years since being synonymized in 1889.

The genus *Chelodina* has been subdivided into functional subgeneric groups known as *Chelodina* "A" (*Chelodina longicollis* group) and *Chelodina* "B" (*Chelodina expansa* group) by numerous recent authors (Goode, 1967; Burbidge et al., 1974; Legler, 1981; Georges and Adams, 1992; Rhodin, 1994a, 1994b). The *Chelodina longicollis* group includes the species *C. longicollis*, *C. steindachneri*, *C. novaeguineae*, *C. reimanni*, *C. mccordi*, and *C. pritchardi*. The *Chelodina expansa* group includes the species *C. expansa*, *C. rugosa*, *C. siebenrocki*, *C. parkeri*, *C. kuchlingi*, and *C. burrungandjii*. The species *C. oblonga* has been difficult to assign to either group. Goode (1967) placed it in group "B" with *C. expansa*, Burbidge et al. (1974) placed it alone in a new group "C" and Georges and Adams (1992) had it variously allied to either group "B" or group "A" depending on their analytic methodology.

John Gilbert collected the holotype of *C. oblonga* when he was in Australia in 1839. He began his travels in Perth, then went on to Sydney, and finally to Port Essington, Northern Territory, before leaving (Cann, 1998). Although it has recently been assumed that he obtained his specimen in Perth (Gray [1841] cited it only as coming from "Western Australia"), it now appears that it may actually have been collected in northern Australia.

In this paper a morphological analysis of the holotype of *C. oblonga* is reported, revealing that it is most similar to *C. rugosa* from the Northern Territory and not similar to the population of *Chelodina* from Perth currently referred to as *C. oblonga*. The taxonomic implications of this discovery are discussed.

Methods. — The holotype of *Chelodina oblonga* (BMNH 1947.3.5.89; old no. [18]40.12.9.81; original no. 74a) (Figs. 1, 2) was examined at the British Museum of

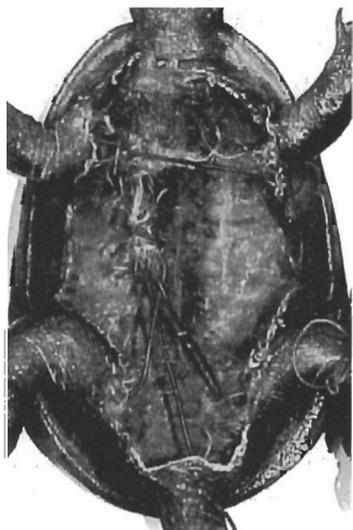


Figure 2. Ventral view of the holotype of *Chelodina oblonga*, with the plastron removed. To the left of the thoracic vertebrae is a disarticulated section of the cervical spine. To the right the rugosity of the retrahens capitis collique muscle can be seen as a faint white "scar" parallel to the thoracic vertebrae.

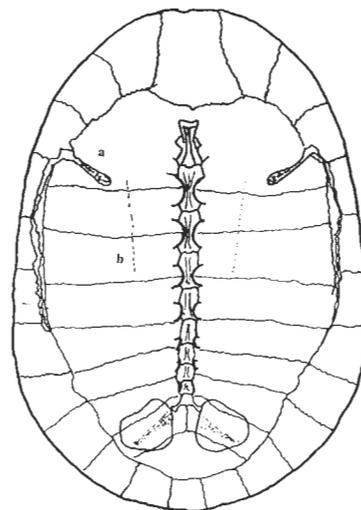


Figure 3. Ventral carapace surface of *Chelodina siebenrocki* (UC 0212). (a) anterior bridge strut; (b) attachment site rugosity of the retrahens capitis collique muscle.

Natural History (London) and compared to the skeletal material of Australian chelids currently housed at the University of Canberra and other museums (see Appendix A). Characters that had previously been determined to be diagnostic within the genus *Chelodina* were utilized to identify the holotype (Thomson and Georges, in prep.). Only those characters useful in this identification are described in this paper. No polarity is given as it is not the purpose of this paper to perform a phylogenetic analysis — all characters will be fully described in a later work which includes a comprehensive phylogenetic analysis of the genus *Chelodina*. Character terminology follows that of Zangerl (1969), with modifications suggested by Pritchard and Trebbau (1984), and bridge strut terminology follows that of Thomson et al. (1997).

Character A: Anterior Bridge Strut. — 0. Anterior bridge strut (called axillary buttress by some authors) does not extend significantly onto pleural one. It curves posteriorly to run perpendicular to the rib gomphosis. 1. Anterior bridge strut extends postero-medially to contact the rib gomphosis at a point approximately halfway to the thoracic vertebrae. No buttressing of the sutural surface present. 2. Anterior bridge strut extends postero-medially to cross the rib gomphosis at a point approximately halfway to the thoracic vertebrae and continue some distance posteriorly to it. Heavy buttressing of the sutural surface present, increasing medially.

Character B: Retrahens Capitus Collique Muscles. — 0. Enlargement of the retrahens capitus collique muscles and subsequent rugosity on the ventral surface of the carapace. This rugosity extends from a point adjacent to the first thoracic vertebrae to the fifth thoracic vertebrae (Fig. 3). 1. No such enlargement of the retrahens capitus collique muscles and hence no rugosity is evident on the undersurface of the carapace.

Character C: Longissimus Dorsi Muscles. — 0. Longissimus dorsi are small with no enlargement of the rib heads and arches. 1. Longissimus dorsi anteriorly enlarged with the first three vertebrae possessing enlarged rib heads and arches to accommodate them. 2. Longissimus dorsi enlarged throughout their length with all vertebrae possessing some degree of enlarged rib heads and arches.

Results. — The *C. expansa* group can be diagnosed by the possession of enlarged retrahens capitus collique muscles which is evidenced in skeletal material by rugosities on the undersurface of the carapace. They are further diagnosed by the possession of a large anterior bridge strut that continues to further than halfway to the thoracic vertebrae from its origins on the fourth peripheral. The longissimus dorsi muscles in this group are enlarged anteriorly only with expansion of the rib heads restricted to the first few vertebrae.

The *C. longicollis* group does not possess the enlarged retrahens capitus collique muscles or their associated features. With the exception of the *C. novaeguineae* complex this group has a rather small anterior bridge strut and there is no enlargement of the longissimus dorsi muscles except in *C. oblonga* (Perth population) where the longissimus dorsi are greatly enlarged throughout the length of the thoracic vertebrae.

The holotype of *C. oblonga* is a dry mount specimen in which the plastron is able to be removed allowing viewing of the internal structures of the shell (Fig. 2). It has enlarged retrahens capitus collique muscles as evidenced by the rugosities on the undersurface of the carapace. An enlarged anterior bridge strut and anteriorly enlarged longissimus dorsi are also present (Table 1). In the three characters examined, the holotype of *C. oblonga* appears indistinguishable from *C. rugosa* and completely different from *C. oblonga* from Perth (Table 1).

The holotype specimen is identical to the specimen originally illustrated by Gray (1841), down to the details of an apparently longitudinally split fifth vertebral scute and the slight variation of the sutural contacts between the abdominal and femoral scutes (i.e., the specimen currently labeled as the holotype is the same specimen originally described and figured by Gray).

Discussion. — The three characters described here can diagnose the carapaces of the two groups within *Chelodina*. It is apparent that the holotype of *C. oblonga* is not the same as the current concept of *C. oblonga* from Perth. It would appear that the holotype is in actuality a specimen of what is currently referred to as *C. rugosa* from the Northern Territory, and that it may possibly have originated in Port Essington. Further morphological evidence of the distinction between the *C. oblonga* holotype and the current concept of *C. oblonga* from Perth can be gleaned from the description of *C. colliei* (Gray, 1856a), the next available name for the Perth species. In that paper Gray stated that *C. colliei* (I hereby designate BMNH 1947.3.5.91 as lectotype) could be differentiated from *C. oblonga* by the highly revolute marginals possessed by the former. The holotype of *C. oblonga* does not possess this character at all and this would indicate that Gray (1856a) intended that these be two separate species.

Since the name *Chelodina oblonga* (based on the holotype) technically applies to the Northern Territory form of the northern long-neck turtle currently known as *C. rugosa* and since *C. oblonga* is the senior synonym of *C. rugosa*, the Principle of Priority of the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature (ICZN, 1999; Article 23) might require a name change for the northern form. In addition, it might also be necessary to resurrect the name *Chelodina colliei* Gray, 1856a, for the southwestern Australian species from Perth. However, such changes would have major destabilizing effects on current prevailing usage of Australian chelid nomenclature.

The ICZN (1999; Article 23.9) allows for the preservation of junior synonyms that have consistent usage. However, to apply this rule to the *C. oblonga* – *C. rugosa* synonymy one

Table 1. Distribution of character states among the taxa of *Chelodina* examined; *long* = *longicollis*, *nov* = *novaeguineae*, *exp* = *expansa*, *rug* = *rugosa*, *obl* (h) = *oblonga* (holotype), *obl* (P) = *oblonga* (Perth population).

	<i>long</i>	<i>nov</i>	<i>exp</i>	<i>rug</i>	<i>obl</i> (h)	<i>obl</i> (P)
Char. A	0	1	2	2	2	0
Char. B	0	0	1	1	1	0
Char. C	0	0	1	1	1	2

must petition the ICZN and demonstrate that (1) the junior name (*C. rugosa*) has in the past 50 years been utilized by at least 10 authors in 25 publications and (2) that the senior name (*C. oblonga*) has not been used since 1899. Since *C. oblonga* is still currently in use and has been for 159 years since 1841, this article does not apply here.

The ICZN (1999; Article 75.6) also allows for the conservation of prevailing usage by designation of a neotype. This rule applies to a situation as described here, where the holotype of a species name under prevailing usage is discovered to actually represent a specimen of a different species. One must then petition the ICZN to use its plenary power to set aside the original holotype and designate a neotype for the species. In this case, that would require that a neotype of *C. oblonga* be designated from a collection of animals from Perth, thereby allowing current prevailing usage of both names (*C. oblonga* and *C. rugosa*) to continue, and to avoid resurrection of the name *C. colliei* which has not been used for over 100 years.

Alternatively, trying to maintain the species concept as originally described by Gray (1841, 1856a) but erroneously synonymized by Boulenger (1889), one can petition the ICZN to suppress the name *Chelodina oblonga* Gray, 1841, and to place this name on the list of unavailable names. If successful, such a petition would establish *Chelodina rugosa* Ogilby, 1890, as the available name for the northern long-neck turtle and resurrect *Chelodina colliei* Gray, 1856a, as the name of the species from Perth.

Until such time as a petition to the ICZN can be resolved, the recommendations of the ICZN (1999; Article 82.1) demand that prevailing usage be maintained and hence the current name for the northern long-neck turtle remains *C. rugosa* and that for the Perth species remains *C. oblonga*.

Acknowledgments. — I would like to thank Colin Macarthy of the Natural History Museum (London) for allowing me to examine the holotypes held there, John Cann and Glenn Shea for sharing their knowledge of the history of collection of the Gilbert specimens, and all those people who have supplied specimens to me over the years, in particular Bill McCord for generously allowing me to examine his collection. Lastly I wish to thank the CRC for Freshwater Ecology for funding my research into chelid taxonomy and Arthur Georges for supporting my research. I also thank John Iverson and Anders Rhodin for discussions and input on this manuscript.

LITERATURE CITED

- BOULENGER, G.A. 1888. On the chelydoid chelonians of New Guinea. *Ann. Mus. Civ. Stor. Nat. Genova* (2)6:449-452.
- BOULENGER, G.A. 1889. Catalogue of the Chelonians, Rhynchocephalians, and Crocodiles in the British Museum (Natural History). London: Trustees of the Museum, 311 pp.
- BURBIDGE, A.A., KIRSCH, J.A.W., AND MAIN, A.R. 1974. Relationships within the Chelidae (Testudines: Pleurodira) of Australia and New Guinea. *Copeia* 1974:392-409.
- CANN, J. 1998. Australian Freshwater Turtles. Singapore: Beaumont Publ., 292 pp.
- COGGER, H.G. 1975. Reptiles and Amphibians of Australia. Sydney: Reed, 584 pp.
- COGGER, H.G. 1979. Reptiles and Amphibians of Australia. 2nd Edition. Sydney: Reed, 608 pp.
- COGGER, H.G. 1983. Reptiles and Amphibians of Australia. 3rd Edition. Sydney: Reed, 660 pp.
- COGGER, H.G. 1985. Reptiles and Amphibians of Australia. 4th Edition. Sydney: Reed, 688 pp.
- COGGER, H.G. 1992. Reptiles and Amphibians of Australia. 5th Edition. Sydney: Reed, 788 pp.
- COGGER, H.G. AND LINDNER, D.A. 1974. Fauna survey of the Port Essington district, Cobourg Peninsula, Northern Territory of Australia: frogs and reptiles. *Aust. C.S.I.R.O. Div. Wildl. Res. Tech. Pap.* 28:63-107.
- COGGER, H.G., CAMERON, E.E., AND COGGER, H.M. 1983. Zoological Catalogue of Australia. Volume 1. Amphibia and Reptilia. Canberra: Australian Govt. Publ. Service, 313 pp.
- FITZINGER, L.J. 1826. Neue Classification der Reptilien, nach ihren Natürlichen Verwandtschaften nebst einer Verwandtschafts-Tafel und einem Verzeichnisse der Reptilien-Sammlung des k. Zoologischen Museum zu Wien. Wien: J.G. Hübner Verlag., 66 pp.
- GEORGES, A. AND ADAMS, M. 1992. A phylogeny for Australian chelid turtles based on allozyme electrophoresis. *Austr. J. Zool.* 40:453-476.
- GOODE, J. 1967. Freshwater Tortoises of Australia and New Guinea (in the Family Chelidae). Melbourne: Lansdowne Press, 154 pp.
- GRAY, J.E. 1841. A catalogue of the species of reptiles and amphibia hitherto described as inhabiting Australia, with a description of some new species from Western Australia, and some remarks on their geographical distribution. In: Grey, G. *Journals of Two Expeditions of Discovery in North-west and Western Australia*. London: T. and W. Boone, Vol. 2. Appendix E, pp. 422-449.
- GRAY, J.E. 1844. Catalogue of the Tortoises, Crocodiles, and Amphisbaenians in the Collection of the British Museum. London: Edward Newman, 80 pp.
- GRAY, J.E. 1856a. On some new species of freshwater tortoises from North America, Ceylon and Australia, in the collection of the British Museum. *Proc. Zool. Soc. Lond.* 1855[1856]:197-202.
- GRAY, J.E. 1856b. Catalogue of Shield Reptiles in the Collection of the British Museum. Part I. Testudinata (Tortoises). London: British Museum, 1855 [1856], 79 pp.
- GRAY, J.E. 1857. Description of a new species of *Chelodina* from Australia. *Proc. Zool. Soc. London* 1856[1857]:369-371.
- GRAY, J.E. 1873. Hand-List of the Specimens of Shield Reptiles in the British Museum. London: British Museum, 124 pp.
- ICZN - INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION ON ZOOLOGICAL NOMENCLATURE. 1999. International Code of Zoological Nomenclature. Fourth Edition. London: Int. Trust Zool. Nomencl., 306 pp.
- IVERSON, J.B. 1986. A Checklist with Distribution Maps of the Turtles of the World. Richmond, IN: Privately Printed, 283 pp.
- IVERSON, J.B. 1992. A Revised Checklist with Distribution Maps of the Turtles of the World. Richmond, IN: Privately printed, 363 pp.
- LEGLER, J.M. 1981. The taxonomy, distribution, and ecology of Australian freshwater turtles (Testudines: Pleurodira: Chelidae). *National Geographic Society Research Reports* 13, 391-404.
- MERTENS, R. AND WERMUTH, H. 1955. Die rezenten Schildkröten, Krokodile und Bruckenechsen. Eine kritische Liste der heute lebenden Arten und Rassen. *Zool. Jahrb.* 83:323-440.
- OGILBY, J.D. 1890. Description of a new Australian tortoise. *Rec. Austral. Mus.* 1:56-59.
- PRITCHARD, P.C.H. AND TREBBAU, P. 1984. The Turtles of Venezuela. *Soc. Stud. Amph. Rept. Contrib. Herpetol.* No. 2, 403 pp.
- RHODIN, A.G.J. 1994a. Chelid turtles of the Australasian Archi-

- pelago: I. A new species of *Chelodina* from southeastern Papua New Guinea. *Breviora* 497:1-36.
- RHODIN, A.G.J. 1994b. Chelid turtles of the Australasian Archipelago: II. A new species of *Chelodina* from Roti Island, Indonesia. *Breviora* 498:1-31.
- RHODIN, A.G.J. AND MITTERMEIER, R.A. 1976. *Chelodina parkeri*, a new species of chelid turtle from New Guinea, with a discussion of *Chelodina siebenrocki* Werner, 1901. *Bull. Mus. Comp. Zool.* 147(11):465-488.
- SHAW, G. 1794. *Zoology of New Holland*. Vol. I. London: J. Davis, 33 pp.
- SIEBENROCK, F. 1909. Synopsis der rezenten Schildkröten, mit Berücksichtigung der in historischer Zeit ausgestorbenen Arten. *Zool. Jahrb. Suppl.* 10(3):427-618.
- SIEBENROCK, F. 1915. Die Schildkrötengattung *Chelodina* Fitz. *Wien Sitz Ber. Ak. Wiss.* 124:13-35.
- THOMSON, S., WHITE, A., AND GEORGES, A. 1997. Re-evaluation of *Emydura lavarackorum*: identification of a living fossil. *Mem. Qld Mus.* 42:327-336.
- WERMUTH, H. AND MERTENS, R. 1961. Schildkröten. Krokodile. Brückenechsen. Jena: Gustav Fischer Verlag, 422 pp.
- WERNER, F. 1901. Ueber Reptilien und Batrachier aus Ecuador und Neu-Guinea. *Verh. Zool. Bot. Ges. Wien.* 51:593-603.
- WORRELL, E. 1963. *Reptiles of Australia*. Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 207 pp.
- ZANGERL, R. 1969. The turtle shell. In: Gans, C., Bellairs, A. d' A., and Parsons, T.S. (Eds.). *Biology of the Reptilia*. Volume I. Morphology A. New York: Academic Press, pp. 311-339.

APPENDIX A Specimens Examined

Chelodina oblonga (Perth population): BMNH 1946.1.22.5, 1947.3.5.90-91, 1899.5.4.1, 64.12.22.9 QM 59272, 59273, 59274, 59283, UC 161-163, 2103; *C. oblonga* (holotype): BMNH 1947.3.5.89; *C. expansa*: AM 1242, 18860-64, 18883, 33209, 40176, 123066, AMNH 103699, 108948-49, BMNH 1947.3.4.21, 1947.3.5.88, QM 12387, 18360, 21742, 21936, 35344, 48015, 48020, 48032, UU 14324, 14328, 14333, 14335, 14369, 14554, 16821, 16825, 17778-79, 17801, 17818, 18800-01; *C. longicollis*: AM 3223, 3226, 8633, 12754, 132778, 142846, 142877-78, 146186, AMNH 2323, 76569, MCZ 8369, 8377, 86783, MNHN 9403, 9405, BMNH 1947.3.5.86, QM 3560, 18359, 21372, 24024, 24134, 35679, 35768, 45021-22, 45022, 48043, 48049, 50583-84, 59266-68, 59281-82, UC 134, 164, 166, 169, 174, 199, 252, 253, 255, 257-58, 263, 265, 268, 270, 285, 288-89, 462, 465-67, UU 14451, 14453, 14458, 16802, 17835, 17837, 17838-42; *C. novaeguineae*: AM 129346, 132784-85, 135351, AMNH 86543-47, MV 4-6, BMNH 1908.2.25.1, NTM 16324-25, 17074, 31790, QM 4486, 4488, 4491, 5269, 10265, 13326, 15560, 15900, 20627-28, 20630-31, 20633, 20635, 26344, 31505-08, 35136, 36751, 37566, 37819, 45005, 47923, 48940, 49917, 50730-32, 50736-37, 50997-98, 53064, 53635, 56408-12, 56447-57, 58412, UC 324-25, UU 14715-18; *C. rugosa*: QM 3852, 17514, 17633-34, 20629, 20632, 20634, 20636-39, 33368, 35146, 37622, 40078-79, 45850, 47912, 47913-14, 50738, 50995-96, 53063, 53065-67, 53324, 57649, 58426, 59264, UC 256, 2102; *C. steindachneri*: AM 33117, 100425-33, 104219, 110940-41, 102689-90, AMNH 118763-64, 101977-79, MCZ 33501, 134469, 134871-72, BMNH 1958.1.7.24, 1958.1.7.25, NWC 521, UC 248, 266, 271, 281, 284, 290, UU 14719-21, 16781; *C. siebenrocki*: UC 0212.

Received: 1 January 1999

Reviewed: 29 January 2000

Revised and Accepted: 25 May 2000