

Two Additional Site Records of the Elusive Gibba Turtle *Mesoclemmys gibba* (Schweigger 1812) from Trinidad, W.I.

The gibba turtle *Mesoclemmys gibba* (Schweigger 1812) is a freshwater turtle species found on the Caribbean island of Trinidad, and across South America (Murphy *et al.* 2018). This nocturnal omnivorous turtle can be found near pools of water or rivers in forests. The literature reports this species on Trinidad in the north east part of the island in the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation, central Trinidad, and in the south west peninsular (Mohammed *et al.* 2010; Murphy *et al.* 2018). Among the known native freshwater turtle species on the island, it is considered the most elusive, with very few sightings and published records. Indeed, Murphy (1997) Mohammed *et al.* (2010) and Mohammed *et al.* (2014) conducted extensive searches over three decades (1980s -2000s) and relied on anecdotal evidence, and literature or museum records to infer its distribution. Freshwater turtles are among the most threatened groups of animals globally (Böhm *et al.* 2013) and information about their distribution can be used towards improved conservation measures. We therefore report two additional site records of the gibba turtle in Trinidad.

On 2 August 2019, at approximately 20:00h we saw a *Mesoclemmys gibba* (Fig. 1.) on the side of a dirt road in Moruga, Trinidad. There was forest on either side of

the road and the area there is known to flood during heavy rains. We estimated the carapace length at 15cm (+/- 2cm). After observing and photographing the turtle, we placed it in the vegetation on the side of the road. The closest published records of this species are from Bush Bush Wildlife Sanctuary (Mohammed *et al.* 2014) and Penal district (Mohammed *et al.* 2010); both more than 30km distance which suggests a wide distribution of the species on the island (Fig. 2.). In addition to the Moruga sighting, one of us (RJA) observed two adults (one female and one male) on December 6 2018 at approximately 19:30h in the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation, near to the sighting reported in Murphy (1997). Both individuals were seen in a pool of water with closed canopy within secondary forest. Upon revisiting the same area in February 2019, the pool had dried and no turtles were seen. The gibba turtle is predominantly aquatic and likely moved on to another water body or was hidden under the mud which perhaps is a consequence of limited sightings.

Murphy (1997) described the distribution of the gibba turtle as disjunctive and relied on a limited number of literature records to which two are added here, from the previous reported sites. Thus, these additional observational records of the gibba turtle at Moruga and Sangre Grande on Trinidad suggest that the species may be more widespread across the island than previously reported (Mohammed *et al.* 2010). Indeed, we postulate that the gibba turtle may be distributed across the southern part of the island, as far south east as Guayaguayare, with similar to suitable habitat as that at Moruga. With sparse number of observed records on this freshwater turtle species in Trinidad, we hope further published records of this elusive turtle can be reported in the future more regularly to help guide measures to conserve the species and its habitat.



Fig. 1. Photographs of Gibba Turtle *Mesoclemmys gibba* from Moruga, Trinidad.

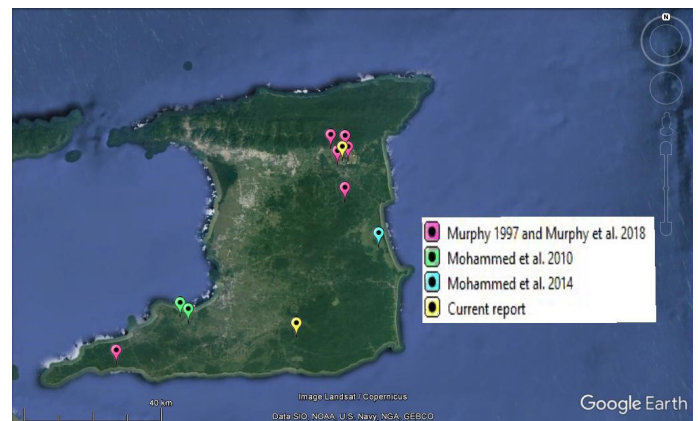


Figure 2. Distributional records of Gibba Turtle *Mesoclemmys gibba* on Trinidad.

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Additional spider family for Trinidad and Tobago, Filistatidae

Currently 53 families of spiders of the infraorders Araneomorphae and Mygalomorphae are confirmed to be found in Trinidad and Tobago (Sewlal and Cutler 2003, Cutler 2005, Sewlal and Alayón 2007, Sewlal 2009, Sewlal 2010, Sewlal 2013). Magalhaes and Ramírez (2019) gives the latest reference and characteristics of the family Filistatidae (Araneomorphae), bringing the total number of families recorded from Trinidad and Tobago to 54.

The record for this family consists of a single adult female *Kukulcania hibernalis* (Hentz, 1842) collected by C. Seiderman in the Arima Valley: [N10.61719°, W61.27437°], in June 1983. An immature specimen was also collected by N. Nieves on 16 February 1959 during a team drive to Diego Martín [N10.37572°, W61.23356°]. Both specimens are housed at the American Museum of Natural History.

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