

individuals averaged 37.5 mm (range 36–39 mm). The nest laid on 30 June 2022 was not excavated until well after the beginning of emergence (24 November 2022), thus, we cannot be sure of the total number of eggs laid but it probably contained seven eggs. One individual successfully hatched and emerged on 28 August 2022 and another on 29 August 2022 with a MCL of 31.5 mm and 31 mm respectively. Park staff examined the nest on 21 September 2022 and found two live hatchlings partially out of their shells, one intact egg, and some shell fragments inside the nest. We found an additional two partially hatched deceased hatchlings on 24 November 2022.

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EMYS ORBICULARIS (European Pond Turtle). PARASITES. The range of *Emys orbicularis* is extensive and includes southern, eastern, and central Europe, the Caucasus, Central Asia to western Turkmenistan, western Kazakhstan, and northwest Africa. *Placobdella costata* is the only Palearctic leech that feeds on the blood of reptiles, particularly *E. orbicularis*. This leech prefers eutrophic wetlands, irrigation canals, and banks of slow-moving rivers, under water and within aquatic vegetation (Darabi-Darestani et al. 2016. *Zootaxa* 4170:41–70). *Placobdella costata* was first noted as a parasite of *E. orbicularis* by Neubert and Neseemann (1999. *Annelida, Clitellata: Branchiobdellida, Acanthobdellida, Hirudinea. Süßwasserfauna von Mitteleuropa – Band 6/2. Spektrum Akademischer, Heidelberg, Germany. 178 pp.*), and later this parasite was noted by other authors (Vamberger and Trontelj 2007. *Natura Sloveniae* 9:37–42; Ayres and Alvarez 2008. *Acta Biol. Univ. Daugavp.* 8:53–55; Bielecki et al. 2012. *Biologia* 67:731–738; Fediras et al. 2017. *Herpetol. Notes* 10:3–8). In some



FIG. 1. *Placobdella costata* on the supracaudal and marginal scutes of the carapace *Emys orbicularis* in southern Agrakhan.

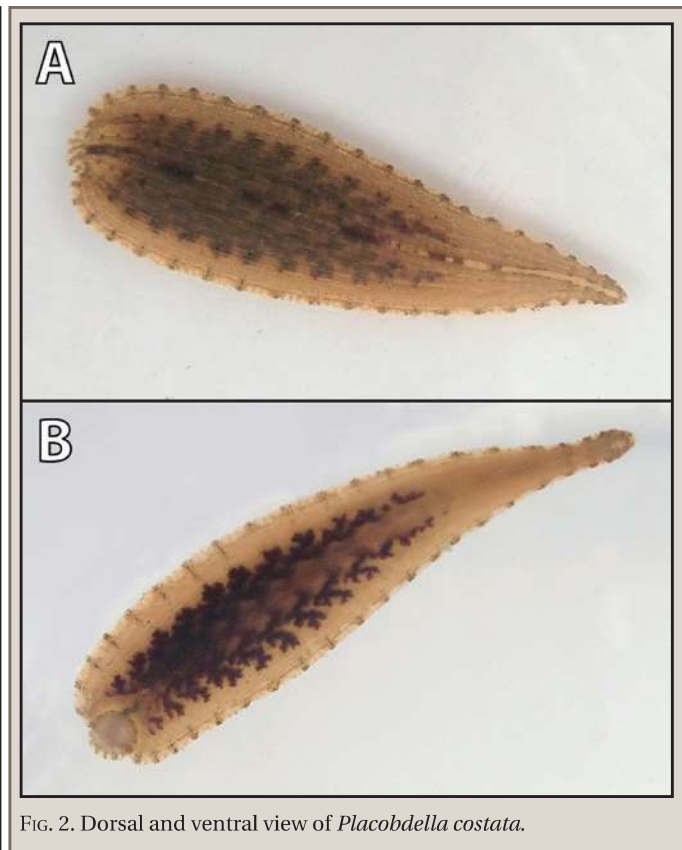


FIG. 2. Dorsal and ventral view of *Placobdella costata*.

parts of its range, *P. costata* infects *E. trinacris*, *Mauremys leprosa*, and *M. caspica* (Arizza et al. 2016. *Folia Parasitologica* 63:1–6; Bashirichelkasari and Yadollahvandmiandoab 2017. *J. Aquat. Res. Dev.* 8:506; Laghzaoui et al. 2020. *Parasitol. Res.* 119:3459–3467). In the territory of Russia, *P. costata* was previously noted on *E. orbicularis* only in the Tver Region in 2021 (www.inaturalist.org/observations/116745752, 17 Sept 2022).

On June 2, 2022, we found three specimens of this leech species on an *E. orbicularis* in the vicinity of southern Agrakhan, Russia (Babayurtovskiy District, 3.5 km south of the village of Novaya Kosa: 43.51926°N, 47.37971°E; Fig. 1). The largest specimen had a length of 38 mm, and the smallest 33 mm. The body of *P. costata* is flat and long with a brown coloration. The dorsal surface is convex with numerous papillae and has six longitudinal rows of yellow spots. The eyes are located on segment III. The mouth opening is located at the anterior edge of the oral sucker (Fig. 2). All leeches were found at the junction of the supracaudal and marginal scutes of the carapace.

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GOPHERUS BERLANDIERI (Texas Tortoise). MORTALITY. *Gopherus berlandieri* (hereafter, Texas Tortoise) is listed as a threatened species in Texas (Judd and Rose 2000. *Occas. Papers*

Museum Texas Tech. Univ. 196:1–12) because its recent distribution has become fragmented, and its population has been greatly reduced (Rose and Judd 1975. *Herpetologica* 31:448–456; Kazmaier et al. 2001. *J. Herpetol.* 35:410–417). Texas Tortoises generally inhabit semi-arid areas of thorn scrub forests and mixed grasslands with sandy soils (Kazmaier et al. 2001. *J. Wildl. Manage.* 65:653–660). This species primarily consumes grasses and forbs, but also eat fruits, insects, and fecal matter of multiple species (Judd and Rose 2000, *op. cit.*). Threats to Texas Tortoises include habitat loss, road mortality, predation, exotic pathogens, and illegal collection (Judd and Rose 2000, *op. cit.*). Herein, we describe a mortality event of a free-ranging Texas Tortoise in southern Texas via strangulation by *Cynanchum laeve* (Honey Milkweed).

A female tortoise (493.2 g, 135 mm carapace length, 112 mm carapace width, 128 mm plastron length, 90 mm plastron width, 72 mm shell height) was found dead on 19 June 2022 at 1656 h on the grounds of a wildlife research area operated by the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute of Texas A&M University-Kingsville (27.2821°N, 97.5254°W; WGS 84; 234 m elev.). Six *Cynanchum laeve* vines were wrapped tightly around the neck of the tortoise, which apparently constricted the tortoise's ability to breathe (Fig. 1). We assume the tortoise could no longer move because when we attempted to pick it up for examination, the vines held the tortoise to the ground. We were only able to pick up the tortoise by cutting the vines. Upon examination, the



FIG. 1. Vines of *Cynanchum laeve* (Honey Milkweed) wrapped around the neck of an apparently healthy, adult female Texas Tortoise (*Gopherus berlandieri*), causing asphyxiation via strangulation in southern Texas.

deceased tortoise appeared to have been healthy, and lacked shell abnormalities or indication of necrotizing scute disease, which had been noted in other tortoises at the area.

The local habitat had been converted from a Honey Mesquite (*Prosopis glandulosa*) shrubland to a mix of native and invasive grasses through burning, cutting, disking, and mowing to enhance tortoise habitat. *Cynanchum laeve* does favor disturbed, open areas (Robinson 1968. *Weed Sci.* 16:436–438). In addition, three weeks prior to finding the tortoise, the area received 6.2 cm of precipitation during a 4-d period that stimulated vegetation growth. *Cynanchum laeve* is adapted to seasonal fluctuations in precipitation during summer and autumn (Soteres and Murray 1981. *Weed Science* 29:625–628). We assessed vine density by the mean number of *C. laeve* vines in ten randomly selected 1 m² plots within a 1 ha area surrounding the tortoise. Vine density was 7.0 ± 0.7 vines/m² with a range of four to twelve vines within the 1 m² plots. Vines of *C. laeve* can obtain lengths of 30 m and as many as 45 daughter shoots can be produced from a single plant (Soteres and Murray 1982. *Weed Sci.* 30:158–163).

Although *C. laeve* is a native plant that is considered beneficial as a larval food of Monarch Butterflies (*Danaus plexippus*), this observation demonstrates that this species can pose a hazard to Texas Tortoises. This is, to our knowledge, the first documented case involving the strangulation of a Texas Tortoise by *C. laeve* vines.

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GRAPTEMYS GEOGRAPHICA (Northern Map Turtle). OVERWINTERING HATCHLINGS. *Graptemys geographica* hatchlings commonly overwinter in their natal nests, and this behavior has been confirmed from Indiana (Baker et al. 2003. *J. Comp. Physiol. B.* 173:643–651), Pennsylvania (Nagle et al. 2004. *Can. J. Zool.* 82:1211–1218), and Vermont (Parren et al. 2021. *Herpetol. Conserv. Biol.* 16:194–202), but has only recently been documented from Canada. Rudy (2021. Nest emergence phenology of the Northern Map Turtle [*Graptemys geographica*] near its northern range limit. M.Sc. Thesis, Queens University, Kingston, Ontario. 65 pp.) found that 75.0% of clutches (30 of 40) overwintered in the nest at sites in the Kingston, Ontario region. Here we report on *G. geographica* hatchlings successfully overwintering in the nest from a second Canadian location in the northern portion of its range.

During field research on turtles in Point Pelee National Park (41.9628°N, 82.5184°W; WGS 84; 175 m elev.), in southwestern Ontario we found evidence of successful overwintering. On 29 April 2022 at ca. 1700 h we found an exit hole from a turtle nest on East Beach. Further inspection revealed 12 *G. geographica*