

## African Spurred Tortoise *Centrochelys sulcata*: Range extension to Algeria

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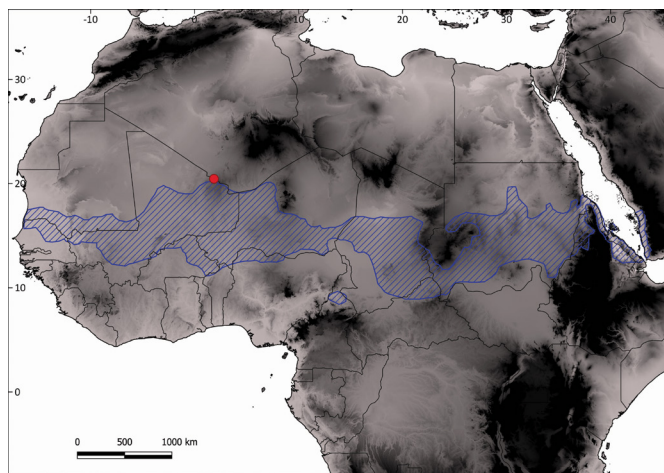
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The African spurred tortoise *Centrochelys sulcata* (Miller, 1779) is the largest extant continental tortoise and the largest tortoise in Africa (Petrozzi et al., 2021). This species extends throughout the Sahel, between Mauritania (where it reaches the Atlantic coast) to the coast of Eritrea (Red Sea) and in Yemen and Saudi Arabia, where it may now be extirpated (Petrozzi et al., 2021) (Fig. 1). In recent assessments its presence in Algeria has been considered Uncertain (IUCN Red List; Petrozzi et al., 2021) even though there are geographically close records from northern Mali and Niger (Petrozzi et al., 2020).

In October 2022 a female of this species (Fig. 2) was found by BAB & BB in the region of Timiaouine, close to the border of Mali (20° 27'29.59" N, 1° 51'29.35" E). The only species of tortoise previously reported from Algeria is the Mediterranean spur-thighed tortoise *Testudo graeca*, a small-sized tortoise present along the Mediterranean coast, Haut Plateaux and pre-Saharan Atlas, but not in the central Sahara and Sahel (Escoriza et al., 2022). Individuals of both species show pronounced thigh spurs, but the tortoise from Timiaouine differs from *T. graeca* by having sharp and triangular anal scutes (Fig. 2) (more rectangular in *T. graeca*), more sculptured plastron, larger cuspidal scales in forelimbs,



**Figure 1.** Map of north Africa showing the known range of *Centrochelys sulcata* based on IUCN (blue polygon) and the newly discovered population (red dot)



**Figure 2.** Female of the *Centrochelys sulcata* (dorsal, ventral), Timiaouine southern Algeria

and yellow claws on the foot (black in Algerian specimens of *T. graeca*; Escoriza et al., 2022).

In Timiaouine, *C. sulcata* was found in an Acacia savannah, which is the typical habitat for this species throughout the Sahel (Petrozzi et al., 2020). The south of Algeria has not been intensely surveyed and range extensions of several vertebrate species, including reptiles, have recently been reported from there (e.g. Bendjeddou et al., 2014; Bakhouche & Escoriza, 2017). The presence of *C. sulcata* in regions bordering Mali suggests that these Timiaouine and Malian populations could be contiguous. Future studies will allow us to assess the extent of the range of *C. sulcata* in southern Algeria and the genetic affinities of this newly discovered population.

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