



A Monograph of the Testudinata (English and Latin Edition)

Thomas Bell

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Turtles—a term that includes tortoises and terrapins—are at once one of Nature’s most recognizable life forms and the most generally beloved among living reptiles. Thomas Bell’s rare and unfinished book, *A Monograph of the Testudinata*, represents the most ambitious attempt ever undertaken to summarize all the world’s turtles, living and extinct, both in words and illustration. The book is an imposing volume, folio in size and with forty magnificent handcolored, full-color plates illustrated by the notable natural history artist James de Carle Sowerby and lithographed by Edward Lear (although better known today for his limericks, Lear began his career as a highly commended painter of birds and landscapes). These lithographed turtles are empathically pleasing and highly successful in capturing the essence of their subjects; as a collection of accurate and artistic drawings on a single group of animals, there are few other works with which to compare them. This Octavo Edition gives these remarkable drawings a well-deserved new lease on immortality and is testament to the enduring value of outstanding illustration.

Few today appreciate the debt owed to the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century naturalists who first sorted out the bewildering kinds of turtles. Thomas Bell was the unrivalled authority on turtles at the time he began *A Monograph of the Testudinata* (he was also the leading British dental surgeon of his day, author of the herpetological volume in Darwin’s series *Zoology of the Voyage of H.M.S. Beagle*, and professor of zoology at King’s College in London). Given the difficulties of the period, and despite changes and clarifications, Bell’s contributions to the anatomy, natural history, distribution, and history of the study of turtles have stood well the test of time, and the plates remain as fresh and vibrant as when they were first published nearly 170 years ago.

Commentary by Kraig Adler, searchable live text.

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