In recent years the Philippines have received increasing attention in biodiversity research, not least because these islands constitute an important biodiversity hotspot (Myers et al., 2000). The current threats for the Philippine biodiversity are causally linked to poverty and an alarming human population growth by c. 2% per year. This results in additional pressure to the few remaining natural habitats. As a consequence, entire islands have lost their original environment already (Heaney and Regalado, 1998). Although the problem was addressed by legal actions such as the “Protected Area Act” (R.A. No. 7586) and the “Wildlife Act” (R.A. No. 9147), wanton destruction of residual habitats goes on. Traditional slash-and-burn practices for shifting agriculture, logging, mining, overfishing, and other unsustainable exploitation of natural resources continue to be major hazards to rainforests, inland waters and marine ecosystems. Over-collection is an additional threat for various vertebrates, in particular for turtles (Diesmos et al., 2004). For obvious reasons, recording the original native fauna of each island is basic for any conservational endeavour, and this is especially true for chelonians.

The Sulu Archipelago, located in the south of the Philippines close to Borneo, is subjected to armed conflicts since decades and its chelonian fauna remains little studied. Gaulke (1995) did not find the species in the early 1990s there. The island of Siasi is separated by c. 50 km seaway from Tawitawi, from where the species was previously recorded (Gaulke, 1995). The distance from Tawitawi to Borneo, where Cyclemys dentata is wide-spread (Fritz et al., 2008), is approximately 100 km air-line. It seems likely that C. dentata, as well as the other geoemydid species, reached the Sulu Archipelago from Borneo during Pleistocene low sea-level stands when the Sulu Islands were repeatedly interconnected and the seaway to Borneo was much narrower, even though a land connection to Borneo did probably not exist during the last 250,000 years (Voris, 2000).
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References

Figure 1. Dorsal and ventral aspect of adult female Cyclemys dentata (MNHN 1985.584) collected on the island of Siiasi in the late 19th century. Photos: F. Höhler.