

RECIPES OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

Introduction—In the old days, *Podocnemis* turtles were a staple, all species, from the small *sextuberculata* to the giant *expansa*. They are now protected. So the following recipes are given more in a historical than a culinary spirit.

SARAPATEL

Decapitate the turtle. Let the blood flow into a bowl and coagulate. Save it. Mince together the meat (with skin), the liver and the blood clot. Leave some fat (a bit chopped, a bit in blobs). Season with salt, black pepper, cayenne, garlic, chopped onions, a little vinegar (or lemon juice), chopped green peppers. Then heat in a pot enough oil to fry the mixture. When it is frying evenly, taste, correct the seasoning and serve. The gravy should be thick and rich.

SARAPATEL 2

Collect the blood from decapitated turtle in a bowl containing a little vinegar and allow to coagulate. Take the heart, lungs and liver (remove gallbladder) and carefully wash them in vinegar and a little lemon juice. Slice them into very small pieces and combine with the coagulated blood together with chopped onions and coriander. Add salt and vinegar to taste. Boil for more than 1 hour. Serve hot with white rum.

STEAKS

Cut thin steaks and leave them overnight (or at least for some hours) in a sauce of vinegar (or lemon juice or, better dry white wine) liberally seasoned with salt, black pepper, cayenne, chopped parsley (plenty), chopped onions, and some oil. Remove from the sauce, let run for a bit, and fry in very hot oil, turning the steaks to fry evenly on both sides. When ready, dry on a piece of wrapping paper and serve.

BROWN SAUCE

Decapitate the turtle. Let the blood run into a bowl with some vinegar, stir to avoid clotting. Save it. Chop the meat in 1 inch long pieces, with the skin. Mince the liver. Fry in a pot, in hot oil; salt, black pepper, garlic, chopped onions, cayenne, chopped parsley, 1 bay leaf. Add the minced liver. When this seasoning is frying well, add the meat and let fry for some 10 minutes. Add the blood and let simmer until the meat is soft.

Adjust the sauce to an almost velvety consistence and serve with rice.

PAXICA

Take a cleaned carapace* and put it to roast over a low fire, so it will not split. Mince the skin and cook it as in streaks above. When it is frying nicely, add water. Pour the mixture in the carapace and let it boil for some minutes. Thicken the broth with strained white flour until it barely runs. Add cayenne to individual taste and serve.

PACHICA

Cut the heart, liver and kidney into ½ inch cubes and fry in the turtle's own fat until crisp.

"MOSQUECA" OR TURTLE STEW

5 lbs turtle meat	palm oil
green vegetables	black pepper
2 c coconut milk	salt
lemon juice	

Chop the meat into cubes and place in a pot with the green vegetables. Add the coconut milk, pepper and lemon juice. Simmer for 30 minutes. Add a generous amount of palm oil and boil for 5 minutes. In Brazil it is served with dumplings of manioc meal which has been dunked in the liquid of the stew and then crisply fried.

ROASTED HAUNCHES

Skin the haunches. Prepare a sauce as in brown sauce above; place the haunches in it and punch plenty of holes with the point of a sharp knife. Fry on the side some condiments (as, for example, in brown sauce that is universal here, you can add or avoid according to your taste), add the haunches, fry them for a few minutes, then add water to barely cover. Let cook but remove before the meat is too soft. Remove the haunches and let them run. When moist, rub well with butter seasoned with garlic, onion, black pepper and chopped parsley (essential); tomato paste if you like. Roast in a hot oven. When the meat is golden, serve.

Geochelone is also protected. Many think it a pity. The male is indifferent fare, but the female is well liked.

IN NUT MILK

Prepare some Brazil nut milk by grinding the nuts very fine, wrapping them in a white napkin (preferably linen) and squeezing. Save. Alternatively do the same to a couple of coconuts or obtain coconut milk. Chop your tortoise, with skin and claws, in pieces about 1 inch long. Fry the meat and the chopped liver as in brown sauce above. When the seasoning has caught, put everything in a pressure cooker and cook for 30 minutes. Serve with cassava flour or rice.

WHOLE

Throw tortoise from the second floor, to make the liver swell. Open a square hole in the plastron*. Through it gut the tortoise, leaving the fat and saving the liver (it can be sliced thin and french fried for a nice canape, that is why it is made to swell). Put through the opening all the seasonings you have in the house. Roast in a very hot oven until it smells delicious.

FROGS (TOADS)

Catch toads, twist off their heads, pull off the skin while all the time holding the animals under running water lest the meat becomes very bitter. Parboil, then cook as any other meat. The above from "Cherokee Cook-lore". 1951. Mary Ulmer and Samuel E. Beck, eds. The Stephens Press, Cherokee, N. C.

ROASTED POISON DART FROG

<i>Epipedobates petersi</i> frogs	salt
manioc	

These frogs are collected by the Campa Indians in Peru who eat these as well as other genera of frogs. They are prepared by salting whatever quantity they have and are wrapped in a leaf and well roasted in campfire ashes to remove the poison and then eaten with manioc. After roasting they may be chewed. Taken from an article by Rodriguez, Lily and Charles W. Myers. 1993. A New Poison Frog from Manu National Park, Southeastern Peru (Dendrobatidae, *Epipedobates*). American Museum Novitates, (3068):1-15.

BETUTE

1 frog	onions, chopped
garlic, ground	cayenne pepper, ground
salt	msg
soy sauce to taste	oil

Dress and grind the leg meat of the frog and mix with a little chopped onions. Grind some cayenne pepper and garlic and add to the mixture. Add salt, msg and soy sauce. Combine well. Put the mixture into the frogs body cavity and let it dry under the sun so that when it is fried it is a little bit crispy.

ADOBO

1 monitor*, dressed	garlic, ground
cayenne pepper, ground	vinegar
salt	soy sauce
msg	onions, diced
water	

Parboil a dressed cut up monitor in a little water until tender. When parboiled saute with garlic and onions. Serve with the cayenne pepper, garlic, vinegar, salt, soy sauce and msg made thick enough for a sauce. Pour over meat and serve.

BROILED RATTLESNAKE

If you are camping out, you might try an old Indian way of cooking rattlesnake. After you have caught your snake cut off the head and tail, and gut it. Wash. Throw it on the campfire coals without skinning. Let it roast until it is tender, then cut it in pieces and let each diner remove the roasted skin and eat the meat with his fingers.

BLACKFEET INDIAN JELLIED SNAKE

1 med snake
2 c indian vinegar*

1 handful mint
2 fingers* coltsfoot salt*

Cut off the head, skin, and take out the intestines. Remove the glands in the tail region. Cut into 1 inch pieces. Wash in cold water. Put the vinegar, mint and coltsfoot salt in some kind of container; put the pieces of snake on top and cover with cold water. Let stand overnight. Put the container over the hot coals in the morning and simmer slowly for about 35 minutes. Remove from the fire and cool. The dish is ready to eat when the jelly has set. This recipe taken from Walker, Herb. 1977. *Indian Cookin'*. Baxter Lane C., Amarillo, Texas.

BAKED SNAKE PAPUA NEW GUINEA STYLE

A dressed snake is slowly smoked over a fire.

BAKED SNAKE AUSTRALIAN BUSH STYLE

Heat the whole snake slowly over a fire, stretching it continuously. This ensures that the juices are retained without the snake contorting. Then make shallow incisions along both sides close to the backbone to cut the sinews. The snake may then be rolled up and tied like a rolled roast and baked in a low oven or on an open fire. The intestines should be removed before serving. The size of the serving, of course, depends on the snake.

TURTLE AND TORTOISE PAPUA NEW GUINEA NATIVE STYLE

Sometimes tortoises and turtles are cooked whole; the shell is broken open and the meat and juices eaten from the shell. Otherwise they are cut up and distributed and baked or boiled in pieces. Turtle eggs are considered a delicacy.

CROCODILE PAPUA NEW GUINEA STYLE

The flesh is usually baked or broiled. Crocodile eggs are regarded as something of a delicacy. The eggs boiled are said to have a creamy consistency. This Papua New Guinea section is taken from May, R. J. *Kaikai Aniani A Guide to Bush Foods Markets and Culinary Arts*.

GOANNAS*

There is an art in cooking goannas. They must always be felt tenderly by an expert to see that the fat is inside, because on the quantity of fat depend its value as a food and delicacy. If it has plenty of fat it must not be held up too long by the neck, or the thin membrane holding the fat will break. The secret is to keep the fat in the membrane bag inside the belly.

Before it is cooked it is placed on a fire and turned over until all the scales become crisp. A native will tell you that this is intended to drive the juices back into the flesh. The vent is held to the fire to make it tender, then sprinkled with sand, and the entrails are carefully drawn out with an expert twist. When it is clean, another incision is made under the forearm. A little hooked stick is put in and turned round to get the liver and gall bladder out, very gently. The gall bladder is then broken off, and the liver is pushed back.

The goanna is then cooked lengthways in the ground oven. The best parts are the ribs and the arms, though, with typical politeness, the natives always give the tail to the white men, who imagine it the best part to eat. The fat is always taken out and everyone eats some. You can eat up to a tea cup full and it will not give you indigestion, and the eggs are excellent. Like most other good, rich food, goanna eggs are taboo to the young, so are crocodile eggs. These are the prerogative of the old men.

BLUE-TONGUES (TILIGUA)*

Blue tongues are cooked exactly like goannas.

MALAYAN DRY CURRY

Turtle meat, after it has been cooked in the oven, can be cut into little cubes, put into the frying pan and cooked as a curry, but it must always be baked in the ground oven first. The cook melts turtle fat in the pan, adds chopped onions and curry powder, and cooks the meat in the pan until it becomes crisp.

Then he thickens the curry with a little flour and adds some water. This is a fine malayan dry curry, made with the delicious turtle meat and cooked in fresh turtle fat.

TURTLE EGGS

I have already described how unlaidd turtle eggs are made into a sausage. Now, should large quantities of laidd eggs be discovered, these can be broken into a real paperbark dish, which is then wrapped up, tied with bush string, and baked on the coals of the fire. The result is like a large cake of hardboiled eggs which will last for several days and is a good stand-by in an emergency. Any eggs can be baked in the ashes, but care must be taken that they are only cooked on the soft white ashes, and that a hole is driven into the upper end of the egg. The eggs are stood up around the fire so that they will cook in the ordinary way, but if there is no hole pierced in the top, you may have an explosion.

TURTLE EGG OMELETTE

Take 12 turtle eggs, (there are usually 60 in a nest), wash them well to remove the sand, then break into a dish. Add half a pint of milk, pepper, salt, and any other flavorings you require, such as chopped bacon, cheese or herbs. Beat again for two or three minutes. Put a little butter in the frying pan, and when it is smoking hot, pour in the egg mixture, stirring it continuously with a fork or an egg slice. At first it will be very watery, like custard, but with continuous stirring it becomes crisp. Turn it over and over for about 15 minutes. This is really a beautiful dish.

TURTLE EGG GRIDDLE CAKES

Take up to 12 eggs and add four spoonfuls of flour, and a little cream of tartar and baking soda. Beat up well, add a little water, and make it a fairly thick batter.

Pour some batter into a hot greased frying pan, to a thickness of about $\frac{1}{2}$ inch. It will immediately double or treble in thickness. When it is perfectly brown on the underside, add a little more batter and turn it over to brown on the other side. Turn the griddle cakes on to a hot plate and sprinkle with sugar.

TURTLE "SOUP"

The natives generally watch the beaches, and capture the turtles as they come up to lay their eggs. The captured creature is first turned over on its back and killed. Next, they make a hole at the base of the neck and through the hole remove all the entrails, including the liver and the heart. The gullet is cleaned and turned inside out, and carefully set aside, as also the long, cleaned gut.

A big fire is blazing away and as it burns down, the cooks grill their special "perks", the liver and smaller pieces of the edible organs. Then the main cooking begins. The eggs that are still left inside the turtle, that is, the soft eggs, are taken out and stuffed into the prepared gullet, which swells to the size of a pineapple. If there are any eggs left over, they are put into the gut to form a large sausage that may be anywhere up to 2 ft long.

When the fire has burned down, it is time to start cooking the turtle, which has been thoroughly washed and cleansed with salt water. Hot stones are now put into the cavity from which the entrails have been removed, then the turtle is laid on its back in the coals and more hot stones and coals are laid upon it. The opening at the neck is made steam proof with leaves well rammed home. The whole is covered in the usual way and left to cook. Meanwhile, the gullet and the sausage are put into hot sand or hot ashes, and inside an hour or two, when the eggs are hard cooked, they are taken out and laid aside to cool. These egg sausages, which last for several days, are eaten in slices. And very good they are, too.

After three or four hours, the ashes are scraped off the turtle; a knife is used to cut round the carapace of the belly, which is torn off and put aside; the stones are removed, and the cooked flesh is exposed. All the stones that were inside are carefully removed, and the shell now looks like a great inverted bowl, only the legs and arms remain to adhere to the sides. In the bottom of the shell are all the juices that have run out during the cooking. Now salt and pepper are added to the steaming broth, and everyone present dips in his pannikin for a taste of the first course.

After the soup comes the meat. The green turtle fat is solid, like beef fat, and in the eating a piece of flesh is wrapped round a smaller bit of green fat. If you are still hungry, you can have a slice of turtle egg sausage later on, as a savoury.

In other places, the sea turtle is cut up before it is cooked, of course, it is sealed over the hot fire to drive the juices into the flesh, according to native custom, before it is cut up. Then it is cooked in the stones, the carapace being used to cover the meat instead of paper bark. For this method of cooking, turtle beef is flavoured with gum leaves or grevillea, and potatoes and onions are cooked alongside.

TURTLE SOUP

Take the fore-flippers and, after washing them thoroughly, boil them, skin and all, in half a kerosene tin of water, keeping the water constantly up to this level. After a time the skin becomes separated, and can be pulled off the flesh. When this occurs, keep the dish simmering until the whole thing becomes like a jelly. Add some salt. This makes a perfect stock, a basis for turtle soup. All you do to complete the cooking is to add vegetables and flavourings as desired, and finish off.

Freshwater turtles are cooked the same as sea turtles.

The above on goannas through turtles is excerpted from Harney, Bill. 1960. Bill Harney's Cook Book. Landsdowne Press, Melbourne. Collaboration with Patricia Thompson.

TURTLE OIL

The following is excerpted from Cutright, Paul Russel. 1940. *The Great Naturalists Explore South America*. The Macmillan Co., N. Y. xii-339, map. Reprinted 1968 by Books for Libraries Press, Freeport, N. Y.

"As soon as all the eggs have been unearthed, those not intended for food are picked up and thrown into a canoe. They are usually broken with wooden implements manufactured for the purpose. But occasionally the Indians, particularly the children, unable to resist the opportunity of a lifetime, jump into the canoe and continue the maceration with their feet. After the eggs are well squashed and everyone is besmeared with yolk and albumin, water is poured on the mass, which is then left in the sun until the heat induces the oil to come to the top. As it reaches the surface, it is skimmed off and boiled. If properly and carefully prepared, the oil is clear and odorless and very like olive oil. It is used in lamps, and also for cooking, being an excellent substitute for lard and butter."

TURTLE (VARIOUS)

The following is excerpted from Bates, Henry Walter. 1863. *The Naturalist on the River Amazons*. John Murray, London. 2 vols. reprinted, abridged in 1864, 466 pp., maps, by John Murray, London. It was again reprinted by the University of California Press in 1962.

"I became so sick of turtle in the course of two years that I could not bear the smell of it, although at the same time nothing else was to be had, and I was suffering actual hunger. The native women cook it in various ways. The entrails are chopped up and made into a delicious soup called sarapatel, which is generally boiled in the concave upper shell of the animal used as a kettle. The tender flesh of the breast is partially minced with farinha, and the breast shell then roasted over the fire, making a very pleasant dish. Steaks cut from the breast and cooked with the fat form another palatable dish. Large sausages are made of the thick-coated stomach, which is filled with minced meat and boiled. The quarters cooked in a kettle of Tucupi sauce form another variety of food. When surfeited with turtle in all other shapes, pieces of the lean part roasted on a spit and moistened only with vinegar make an agreeable change."

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publisher's note

As a person who strongly supports conservation efforts to protect amphibians and reptiles as well as other animals, you might wonder why on earth I would publish a cookbook of amphibian & reptile recipes. The main reasons are because Ernie Liner is the author and I don't view this as a cookbook *per se*.

I first met Ernie in 1996 at the meeting of the Society for the Study of Amphibians and Reptiles (SSAR), a professional meeting for scientists who study these animals. Ernie had brought a few books from his library to sell, and as a book collector and dealer I was interested in what he had. From our first meeting I knew Ernie was unique in his kindness and generosity.

In 1998 the University of Colorado at Boulder awarded Ernie a Honorary Doctor of Science for his contributions to herpetology. Ernie's contributions include numerous scientific publications on the amphibians and reptiles of México and his home state of Louisiana as well as other papers. He has also been a long supporter of the scientific societies in both the USA and México. Ernie has meticulously compiled several useful bibliographies for herpetologists. This cookbook is yet another meticulous compilation of Ernie's which stems from both his love of cooking and his love of herpetology. Although this cookbook may not seem like an academic pursuit, it really is one.

The introduction of the first edition of this book, *A Herpetological Cookbook: How to cook Amphibians and Reptiles*, begins with "Dear Colleague," and goes on to explain the book was published for the 1978 joint meeting of the SSAR, Herpetologists' League, and the American Society of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists — hardly a group likely to start throwing their study animals into their soup. Disguised as a cookbook this is a contribution to culinary folklore and anthropology. In this light, the significance of such a collection of recipes became important to preserve and make available. Thus I agreed to publish it for its value as documentation of one aspect of the human–amphibian/reptile relationship.

I have never eaten an amphibian or reptile and I never intend to eat one. I realize some people will wish to use this book as a cookbook — several of the recipes look quite interesting. My only hope is they decide to substitute a more common reptile* for the meat — a chicken. After all, IT ALL TASTES LIKE CHICKEN anyway.

Breck Bartholomew

*Evolutionarily birds are feathered reptiles. In fact, crocodylians are more closely related to birds than they are to snakes.