

The animal dwells mostly in the water, but comes out from time to time and basks in the sun on the shore, or on any exposed surface, usually in such a position that at the first approach of danger it may drop directly down into the water, or reach it quickly. The slender legs are ill fitted for travelling on dry land, but easily carry the body through the water over its bottom. When surprised away from the water, the animal seeks the nearest hiding-place; if the danger is close at hand, it quickly withdraws the exposed parts into the shield, and, if pressed still farther, it resorts at last to biting, not throwing the head quickly and forcibly out as the Chelydroidæ do, but stretching it out rather slowly towards the assailant, and then snapping the jaws forcibly upon it. The manner of withdrawing the legs is very peculiar. The fore legs are carried round before the body; the elbow, somewhat raised, is carried directly back by the side of the head and neck into the scapular arch, the skin at the same time rolling off towards the feet and shoulders, and leaving its muscles as naked as those of the neck and scapular arch about it; the forearm is turned back, but not quite on to the humerus; the hand is either laid in against the head and neck, or turned back on to the humerus. See Pl. 4 and 5. The hind legs are withdrawn nearly horizontally, the knees like the elbows, though in a less degree, stripped of the skin; the foreleg is turned back upon the femur, and the foot again turned forward upon the foreleg. The tail is turned to one side. The head is drawn back to within the scapular arch, the skin rolling off from the neck, but not folding together before the head, as in the Emydoidæ. When the plastron is hinged, its ends are raised so that the limbs are pressed still farther up into the carapace.

The food is principally animal, but whether exclusively so or not, I do not know. As stated above, the habits of these Turtles are entirely aquatic. Their natural dispositions are a singular mixture of shyness and of fierceness. They remind us of the Insectivora among Mammalia, the rapacious habits of which are also in strange contrast with their small size and feebleness. Their motions are also quick, though awkward, and almost feverish. When they bite, they strike repeated blows, darting the head only, and not the whole body, as the Chelydroidæ do,—the short tail, and especially the slender limbs, affording no adequate means to throw forward the whole bulk of the animal with sufficient force to aid in the assault.

The Cinosternoidæ lay few eggs only, from three to five, which they deposit on the shore near the water's edge, in holes dug with their hind legs. The eggs have the form of a rather elongated ellipse, with very blunt ends. They have a shining glazed surface, much smoother than that of other Turtles. Their shell is very thick and brittle, even more so than in the Trionychidæ.