HL Paper 2

The Chinese soft-shelled turtle, *Pelodiscus sinensis*, lives in salt water marshes. The turtle can live under water and out of water.

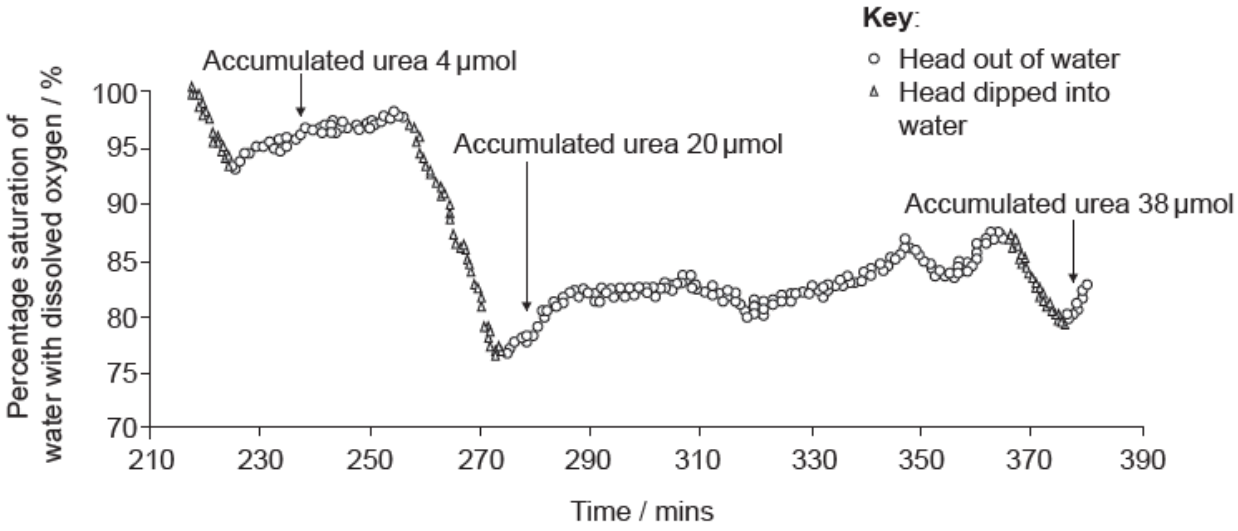
These turtles have fully developed lungs and kidneys, however, many microvilli have been discovered in the mouth of *P. sinensis*. A study was undertaken to test the hypothesis that oxygen uptake and urea excretion can simultaneously occur in the mouth.

Initial experiments involved collecting nitrogen excretion data from *P. sinensis*. The turtle urinates both in water and out of water. When in water it allows waste products to be washed out of its mouth. When out of water it regularly dips its head into shallow water to wash its mouth. The table shows the mean rates of ammonia and urea excretion from the mouth and kidney over six days.

	Excretion of nitrogen by the mouth / μmol day^{-1} g^{-1} turtle		Excretion of nitrogen by the kidney / μmol day^{-1} g^{-1} turtle	
	Turtle submerged in water	Turtle out of water	Turtle submerged in water	Turtle out of water
Ammonia	0.29	0.30	0.63	0.54
Urea	0.90	1.56	0.07	0.73

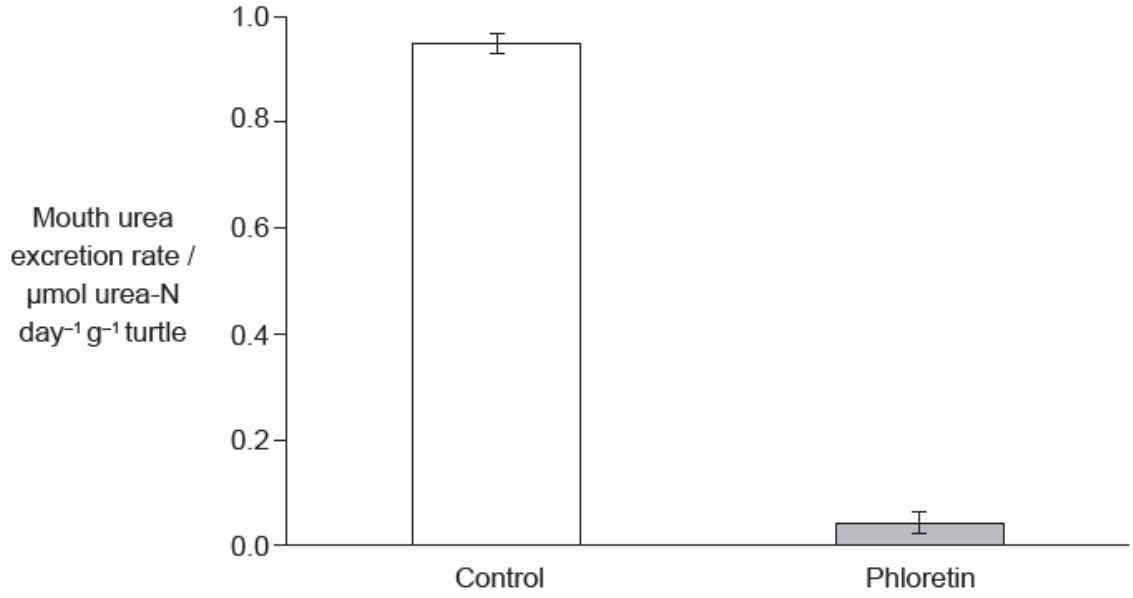
[Source: Reproduced with permission, Y. Ip *et al*. (2012) *The Journal of Experimental Biology*, 215, pages 3723—3733. jeb.biologists.org. doi: 10.1242/jeb.068916]

It was noted that during long periods out of water, turtles rhythmically moved their mouths to take in water from a shallow source and then discharge it. Changes in the dissolved oxygen and the quantity of accumulated urea in the rinse water discharged by the turtles were monitored over time as shown in this graph.



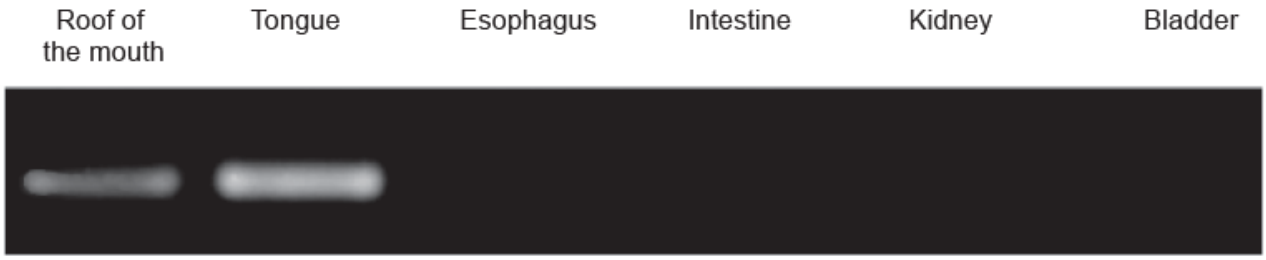
[Source: adapted with permission from Y. Ip *et al*. (2012) *The Journal of Experimental Biology*, 215, pages 3723–3733.]

In order to test whether a urea transporter was present in the mouth tissues of the turtles, phloretin (a known inhibitor of membrane proteins that transport urea) was added to the water in which a further set of turtles submerged their heads. The results of that treatment are shown.



[Source: Reproduced with permission from Y. Ip *et al*. (2012) *The Journal of Experimental Biology*, 215, pages 3723–3733. jeb.biologists.org.]

Further research was conducted to determine where mRNA expression of a urea transporter gene might be occurring in *P. sinensis*. Gel electrophoresis was used to analyse different tissue samples for mRNA activity.



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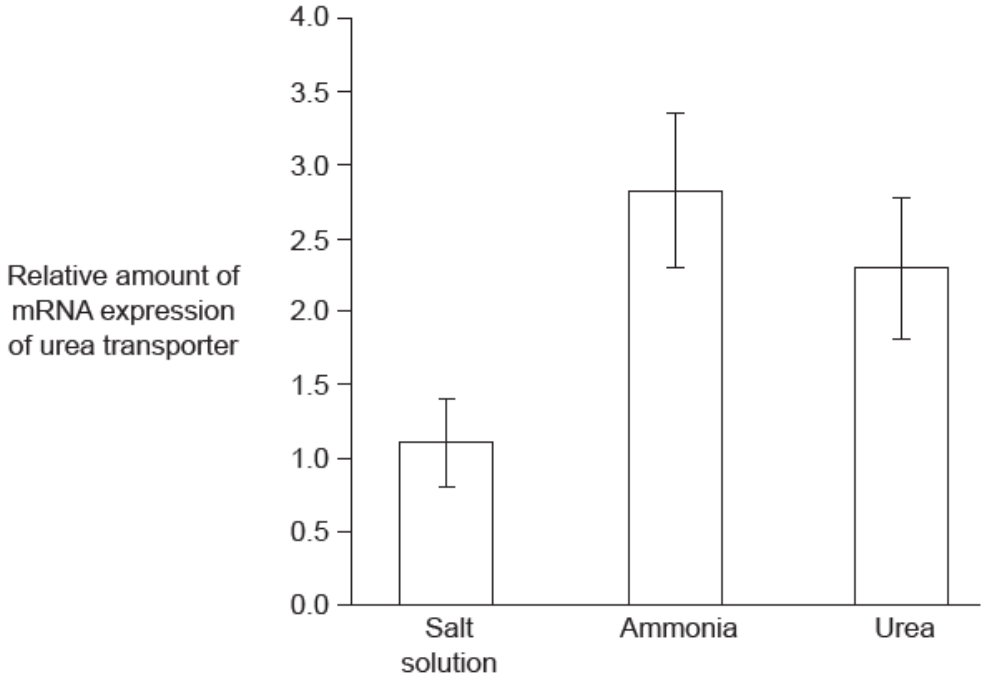
Expression of the urea transporter gene by cells in the turtle's mouth was assessed by measuring mRNA activity. Turtles were kept out of water for 24 hours and then injected with either a salt solution that matched the salt concentration of the turtle, dissolved ammonia or urea, followed by another 24 hours out of water.



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a. Deduce whether the excretion of ammonia or urea changes more when a turtle emerges from water. [2]

b. Compare and contrast the changes in urea excretion in the mouth with the changes in urea excretion in the kidney when a turtle emerges from the water. [3]

c.i. Describe the trends shown by the graph for dissolved oxygen in water discharged from the mouth. [1]

c.ii. Suggest reasons for these trends in dissolved oxygen. [2]

d. Deduce with a reason whether a urea transporter is present in the mouth of *P. sinensis*. [2]

e. Outline the additional evidence provided by the gel electrophoresis results shown above. [2]

f.i. Identify which of these turtle groups represent the control, giving a reason for your answer. [1]

f.ii. Suggest a reason for the greater expression of the gene for the urea transporter after an injection with dissolved ammonia than an injection of urea. [2]

g. The salt marshes where these turtles live periodically dry up to small pools. Discuss the problems that this will cause for nitrogen excretion in the turtles and how their behaviour might overcome the problems. [3]