

Charleston July 1 - 1837

Dear Nason

I received your letter
some time since but have neglected until this
moment to answer it because this is the first
time since that I have had occasion to use you,
as it is I want a certain flat species of terrapin
with a yellow belly - found in the river where the
bed is rocky - these are often exposed for sale in
the market - but should none be there you must
have some people to collect - half a dozen or
so and send them to me at once - they may be
put in a small box with a few air holes & sent
by the Rail Cars - giving a line by mail the same
day - also I want a soft shell turtle - he may
be sent the same way taking care only to place
a little moist earth in the bottom - and giving
directions not to let them be placed in the sun -
any expense I will cheerfully pay - or you may
present it to ~~my~~ friend Dr Cousins of the Bank
at Hamberg & he will pay it for me - yours
Truly
J E Holbrook

answer this by return }

JOHN EDWARDS HOLBROOK (1794-1871), the Father of American Herpetology, a physician living in Charleston, South Carolina, was the first person to publish a comprehensive summary of the North American herpetofauna. To do so, he assembled an extensive collection of amphibians and reptiles for his own study and for use by his several artists in the production of his magnum opus, "North American Herpetology" (first edition, 1836-1840; second edition, 1842). Wherever possible, Holbrook preferred living specimens for his artists, in order that the animals could be rendered more accurately, and he went to great effort and expense to acquire them. Specimens were obtained from Holbrook's own collecting in all of the Atlantic coastal states and from his numerous correspondents throughout eastern North America. In this letter (transcribed at the right), Holbrook requests two kinds of turtles from his distant relative, Elias Nason, then residing in Augusta, Georgia. He also gives instructions on where to collect, how to ship them alive, and payment. For further details, see page 33. (Original letter in Adler collection.)

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Dear Nason

I received your letter some time since
but have neglected until this moment to answer it because this is
the first time since that I have had occasion to use you. As it is I
want a certain flat species of terrapin with a yellow belly
[probably *Pseudemys scripta*] - found in the river where the bed
is rocky - These are often exposed for sale in the market - but
should none be there you must have some people to collect - half
a dozen or so and send them to me at once - They may be put in a
small box with a few air holes & sent by the Rail Cars - giving a
line by mail the same day - also I want a soft shell turtle [*Trionyx*]
- he may be sent the same way taking care only to place a little
moist earth in the bottom - and giving directions not to let them
be placed in the sun - any expense I will cheerfully pay - or you
may present it to my friend Dr Cousins of the Bank at Hamberg
[Hamburg, South Carolina] & he will pay it for me - yours
Truly

answer this by return }

J E Holbrook