Giant African Land Snail (*Lissachatina fulica*)

**Background**

Originally introduced to Hawaii in 1936 and Florida 1966. Florida’s original eradication campaign took ten years and cost 1 million dollars. The snail was rediscovered in 2011 and eradication efforts are still underway in 2015.

Giant African snails are eaten in many countries and sold as canned pet food for skinks, turtles, monitors, and small animals.
Range and Distribution

Giant African Snails are native to East Africa and found in Asia. In the USA, the snails are under quarantine in Southern Florida and Hawaii. In June 2015, APHIS established additional regulated areas in Florida. They are sold and raised as pets in other countries, including Europe. While not yet in New York, the Giant African land snail, owing to the illegal pet trade, the species is prohibited in the state.

Identification and Biology

One of the largest terrestrial snails, full-grown adults can reach almost 8 inches (20 cm) long and 5 inches (13 cm) in diameter. Adult shells are brownish with darker brown lengthwise stripes, have seven to nine whorls including a swollen long body whorl, and covers at least half the length of the snail. Snails have female and male reproductive organs. One mating can result in multiple clutches of eggs over time. Rapid population increases are likely because each snail can produce 1,200 eggs per year.

Close-up of Giant African land snail. (Photo: Yuri Yashin, achatina.ru, Bugwood.org)
Giant African land snail egg clutch. (Photo: Yuri Yashin, achatina.ru, Bugwood.org)
Hosts and Habitats

The snails are found in many plant habitats and are known to preferentially consume beans, peas, cucumbers, melons, and peanuts. Also at risk are ornamental plants, tree bark, and even the plaster, stucco, or paint on buildings.

No surface is off-limits to the snails. Giant African land snail on Florida refuse bin. (Photo: Andrew Derksen, FDACS/DPI, Bugwood.org)
Impacts

Because of their large size, ability to consume over 500 different kinds of plants, and cause damage to plaster and stucco buildings, the Giant African Snail is one of the most damaging snails in the world. The snails are also a potential risk to human health because they can carry a parasitic nematode that can cause meningitis.

Giant African land snail infestation in Florida tree. (Photo: David G. Robinson, USDA APHIS PPQ, Bugwood.org)
Prevention and Control

Giant African Snails are able to survive cold temperatures in a semi-hibernation state. They represent a potential threat to New York even though they thrive in tropical/subtropical areas. If a snail shell is larger than two inches (5-6 cm) it is most likely a type of Giant Snail. Do not handle with bare hands. Importation is prohibited and will be confiscated by customs, never purchase as pets or educational animals through foreign online dealers or local distributors. For safe removal, contact local NY DEC, CCE, or USDA offices if found outdoors or for sale.