GIANT AFRICAN SNAIL

The threat: This snail is not established in New Zealand. If it became established here, it would pose a serious threat to agriculture, native species and human health.

It is a voracious herbivore, consuming large volumes of both native and cultured plants.

The snail can also act as a vector of human disease. It is advisable to wash hands after handling the snail.

BIOLOGY

The Giant African snail *(Achatina fulica)* is a tropical snail, but can survive cold conditions, even snow, by hibernating. It will readily enter a state of hibernation and can survive for months in this state.

Giant African snails are distinctive in appearance. Key identifying characteristics include:

SHELL LENGTH: usually 5 to 10 cm, but can be up to 20 cm long.

SHELL COLOUR: most commonly light brown, with alternating brown and cream bands on young snails and the upper whorls of larger specimens.

SHELL SHAPE: long, narrow and conical.

GIANT AFRICAN SNAIL
ACHATINA (LISSACHATINA) FULICA BOWDICH

HOSTS

The normal food of the Giant African snail consists of decayed vegetation and animal matter, lichens, algae and fungi. However, it is likely that the potential of the snail as a pest may only become apparent when it is established in a new environment such as New Zealand. It has a voracious appetite and has been recorded as attacking over 500 different kinds of plants including a large number of ornamentals, most species of vegetables, legumes, pumpkins and melons although it has a preference for brassicas, lettuce, potato, onions, sunflowers and Eucalypts. The Giant African snail has also been recorded on the bark of relatively large trees such as citrus.

DISTRIBUTION

Originally a native of Eastern Africa it is now present in most of the Pacific and Indian Ocean Islands including Guam, French Polynesia, New Caledonia, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Timor, Vanuatu, Philippines, Indonesia, India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, China, Taiwan, Brazil, Caribbean, Mauritius, Réunion, Seychelles and parts of western Africa.

BIOSECURITY RISK TO NEW ZEALAND

The main biosecurity risk lies in the introduction of the snail in New Zealand attached to plant material, crates, containers, machinery or motor vehicles. It can hide out of general sight and eggs may be introduced in soil. Snails can be active at 10°C when provided with sufficient moisture. Snails in hibernation, that have drawn deep into their shell, can lose 60 percent of their weight and consequently can be mistaken for dead specimens, and carried by travellers as shell-collector specimens. Airport interceptions are also made as travellers bring in the delicacy to satisfy expatriates with a meal from home!

Containers and cargo from high-risk giant African snail (GAS) infested countries are inspected on arrival.

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