

Giant African Land Snails

Introduction:

There are several species sold as Giant African Land Snails, these are:

East African Land Snails (Achatina fulica)

West African Land Snails (Achatina marginata)

The other snail that is sometimes seen is the very large *Achatina achatina* that has been recorded at over 37cm in size from snout to tail and a shell size of 27cm.

Achatina fulica is a tropical snail, but can survive cold conditions, even snow, by aestivating (equivalent to hibernation). Snails are hermaphroditic (both male and female), and after a single mating can produce a number of batches of fertile eggs over a period of months. This does NOT mean that they can mate with themselves, they still require a partner. *A. fulica* lays eggs in batches of 100 to 400 with up to 1200 being laid in a year.

Eggs are spherical to ellipsoidal in shape (4.5-5.5 mm in diameter) and are yellow to cream in colour. These hatch after about 8-21 days under tropical conditions. The eggs hatch releasing snails about 4mm long. After eating their own shell, the baby snails move straight onto adult food, maturing in six to nine months, depending on temperature and food.

These snails grow up to 10mm per month. After 6 months, the *Achatina fulica* is about 35mm long and may already be sexually mature. Sexual maturity takes 6 to 16 months, depending on weather and the availability of calcium. This snail lives 5 or 6 years, sometimes as many as 9 years.

Housing:

Snails are one of the easiest of the exotic pets to keep. All you need is a reasonable sized tank (plastic or glass) with a secure lid, some general-purpose compost, a small water dish and a heat pad.

Snails should have fresh substrate every week and this should be at least 1-2 inches deep to allow the snail to bury itself as it would in the wild.

Feeding:

Snails will eat almost any vegetable or fruit, just make sure that you rinse the food well to ensure that any pesticides are washed off. Mine are rather keen on Peppers, Cucumber and Cos lettuce. They have also eaten apple, nectarine, grapes, banana, peach, plums, etc They will also eat brown bread and moistened dog biscuits. Please ensure that ALL vegetable food is washed before use as otherwise residual pesticides may cause the untimely death of the snail.

Snails need calcium, and to get this the best source is cuttle fish bone (same as you use for budgies). Without this calcium the snails shell will not be very strong and maybe slow to grow.

Snails are also fond of the occasional drop of beer. Not to much, as you'll end up with an alcoholic or pickled snail!

Handling:

Snails don't seem to mind being handled, you might not like to be slimed though!

A word of warning though, please treat them gently as you can easily damage the new shell growth at the base of the shell.

For more information see:

Web:

<http://arachnophiliac.com/burrow/home.htm>

<http://www.geocities.com/Heartland/Valley/6210>

Books:

Your First Giant African Land Snail - Lucie Mann ISBN 185279057-1 Published by Kingdom Books

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