

# 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 & 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 & female) & after a single mating can produce several 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) & 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 & food.

These snails grow up to 10mm per month. After 6 months, the *Achatina fulica* is about 35mm long & may already be sexually mature. Sexual maturity takes 6 to 16 months, depending on weather & 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 & a heat pad. Snails should have fresh substrate every week & 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 before use, as residual pesticides may cause the untimely death of the snail. Peppers, Cucumber & Cos lettuce are good options. In addition, apple, nectarine, grapes, banana, peach & plums may be consumed. They may also eat brown bread & moistened dog biscuits.

Snails need calcium & to get this the best source is cuttle fish bone (same as you use for budgies). Without this calcium a snail's shell will not be very strong & maybe slow to grow. Snails are also fond of the occasional drop of beer: not too much, as you'll end up with an alcoholic or pickled snail!

## Handling:

Snails don't seem to mind being handled, although you may not like to be slimed! A word of warning: please treat them gently as you can easily damage the new shell growth at the base of the shell.

## Books:

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