



Portsmouth Reptile & Amphibian Society  
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P.R.A.S Care sheet No 12

Species Common Name: **Giant African Land Snails**

Scientific Name: *Achatina fulica* & *A. marginata*



**Care Difficulty:** Ideal invertebrate for the beginner.

**Distribution:**

The species is native to the continent of Africa. It is prized as a source of protein in the diet of many African tribes. The snail has been introduced to many tropical areas such as Thailand, Hawaii and many Pacific Islands where it is now considered a pest. In these countries and more, laws are in force forbidding the ownership of these animals as pets.

**Description:**

Snails have both male and female sex organs, but they still mate sexually with other snails. The eggs of *A. marginata* are the size and appearance of small bird's eggs. They are laid in batches of up to 20.

**Size:** Adult can grow up to 30cm (12") in body length.

**Housing:**

Snails can be housed in very simple set ups such as plant propagators, plastic storage boxes or glass aquariums. The majority of snail keepers seem to prefer the aquarium. A 60x30x30cm (24x12x12") tank is generally adequate for a pair of snails provided they are normal adult size, about 20cm (8") in body length. The fish tank must have a secure lid. Snails are not the fastest escape artists in the world they are certainly the most determined and climb the glass walls easily. Although the lid should be secure there must be some snail proof form of ventilation to prevent excessive humidity. A good substrate for the tank is a 70:30 peat /vermiculite mixture. Peat alone can dry out quickly; the vermiculite helps retain the moisture. Fill the bottom of the tank to about 3cm depth with substrate and lightly spray with water. The substrate will get damper by vegetation

sweating and snails defecating, so care must be taken to avoid the bottom becoming too muddy. A regular change of substrate is necessary; the time period between changes will depend of type and amount of food and size and number of snails. The snails should be kept at temperatures between 18-29°C (65-84°F), with the middle of this range being best.

### **Diet and Feeding:**

Snails are vegetarian. For such simple creatures they can sometimes be annoyingly fussy over food. Whatever you feed them, make sure that it is washed to remove any pesticides. Most will eat the flat leafed round lettuce, some will also take Cos, romaine and little gem lettuces. Iceburg lettuce is more often than not shunned. Some snails will take green leaves from cabbages, greens, chard and kale. Salad vegetables/ especially cucumber are enjoyed though this can make the tank soggy if offered regularly. They will also eat soft fruits. The provision of a shallow dish of water is optional, as they do get most water from the vegetables they eat. The important thing to remember is that the snails MUST have a constant supply of calcium to keep the shell strong. This is easy to achieve by giving a cuttlefish bone which they will devour ravenously (other sources of calcium include egg shell, calcium supplements from pets shops, crushed snail shell, and natural chalk.

### **Breeding:**

Giant African Land snails are hermaphrodites (i.e. they are both male and female). The snails breed by shooting white 'love darts' into each other - you can sometime see this as a white bulge on the neck, just behind the snails eye, on the right side. Eggs will soon be deposited, you can easily recognise these - they will be about 4 mm in length (for the East African species - *Achatina fulica* - this is the one most commonly held in captivity), and either white or yellow in colour - and they are the same shape as chicken eggs. Place the eggs into a bowl with a bit of the peat in which they were laid - make sure the peat is kept damp by spraying it as and when necessary and ensure that the eggs are not exposed to extremes of heat or cold. They should hatch within a month after the time they were laid. The hatchlings are very small and transparent at first, but they quickly grow! If you need to move them, try putting a lettuce leaf in the tank and letting them all climb aboard.