

GIANT LAND SNAILS

Giant Land snails make interesting pets and they are very easy to keep, requiring little attention. Snails belong to the group of animals known as the molluscs, soft bodied animals, many of which have shells and produce mucus to enable them to move. Giant Land snails are active during the day as well as the night, they can live for several years and become quite tame. As their name suggests they grow to a large size, specimens of *Achatina fulica*, the most commonly kept snail have been reported to grow to 20cm in shell length. Most Giant Land snails kept in Britain originate from Africa, where they are often eaten as a delicacy.

HOUSING

Giant Land snails can be kept in a large variety of containers depending on the size of the specimens and the number kept. The most convenient cages are those that can be cleaned easily, a fish tank with a lid or a plant propagator is ideal. The snails like to hide away at times and often burrow, it is therefore important to have several centimetres of substrate i.e.. peat, vermiculite on the bottom of the cage, and pieces of bark. The snails also appreciate some moss or leaf litter and this can make an attractive display. Giant Land snails can be kept at room temperature during the summer, but during the winter some form of additional heating will be necessary i.e.. a heating pad, snails will shy away from a light bulb. If a temperature of 20c-25c were maintained the snails would grow at a much faster rate than they would do at room temperature.

FEEDING

Giant snails are easy to feed, they will eat most fruits and vegetables. I find the most popular foods are lettuce, apple, banana and cucumber. I do occasionally spray my snails with tepid water from a plant sprayer, but usually they obtain enough moisture from their food. To keep their shells strong and healthy it is vital to provide a source of calcium, for example cuttle fish or natural chalk. These should be placed whole into the cage and the snails will rasp away on them with their tiny rows of teeth.

BREEDING

All snails are hermaphrodite, this means that each individual possesses both male and female sexual organs, it is still necessary to have two snails to mate and produce offspring, but it does not matter which two! Giant snails will also produce young when they are not fully-grown, sometimes when they are only 4 or 5 cm. long. Snails lay eggs, they are usually white, round and laid in clutches in the soil. The size and number laid will vary with species. *Achatina fulica* lay from 30-200 eggs and these will take about two weeks to hatch if kept at a temperature of around 20c-25c. The eggs can be simply left in the cage to hatch. However a method which will produce a better hatching rate is to gently remove the eggs and surrounding soil to a plastic box, the eggs should be kept fairly moist and when the small snails begin to emerge (often over several days) place a lettuce leaf in the box. The snails will cluster on the leaf and can then be removed to a larger container, or back with their parents. If the eggs are left in the cage the adult snails burrowing often disturb them. The rate at which the young snails grow is very much dependant on temperature, food and the supply of calcium.