

ENTOMOLOGICAL NEWS

Your Next Pest Introduction As Close As Your Computer

The following article recently appeared on the USDA website and shows how easily a pest can be purchased online and introduced into new areas.

<http://www.aphis.usda.gov/wps/portal/aphis/home/>

Washington, D.C. – Aug. 29, 2014 - USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), acting on a tip, seized an adult giant African snail (GAS) and 284 juvenile snails from a residence on Long Island, New York on June 26. The GAS is classified as a non-native invasive pest in this country. The Long Island resident admitted that the adult snail was obtained from a seller in Georgia.

APHIS officials contacted the Georgia-based seller and arranged an interview. The seller was found to possess 949 GAS, which he stated were originally purchased from a source in Great Britain and sent to the United States via mail. All snails were identified as GAS and seized. From information obtained from the seller, APHIS also seized a GAS in Indiana, one in Pennsylvania, and one in Albany, New York. To date APHIS has seized 1,237 GAS from this incident. All snails originating with the seller Georgia have been seized, though the investigation is ongoing.

In July, APHIS officials seized an additional 67 GAS from an individual who imported two baskets of snails from Nigeria into Los Angeles, California. Two veterinary health certificates issued by an unknown entity accompanied the shipment stating the snails were free of communicable disease and fit for human consumption. However, it is illegal to

possess, import or transit GAS into the United States without a permit from APHIS. Currently, no permits are being issued for GAS.

The GAS is one of the most damaging snails in the world because it consumes as many as 500 types of plants and can cause structural damage to plaster and stucco buildings. The snail is also a public health hazard as it can carry a parasitic nematode that causes meningitis in humans. The GAS reproduces quickly, producing about 1,200 eggs in a single year. The GAS was first found in southern Florida in the 1960s, and it took 10 years and \$1 million to eradicate it. It was reintroduced in Florida in 2011, with eradication efforts still underway.

APHIS would like to remind everyone that it is illegal to keep or own this non-native invasive pest in the United States. "Collectors and hobbyists should not purchase GAS. When released into backyards and in communities they cause extensive and expensive damage. If anyone sees a giant African snail, please report it to your local or federal agriculture program office immediately," said Wendy Beltz, Director of the Smuggling Interdiction and Trade Compliance (SITC) Program within APHIS. "SITC officials safeguard our agricultural resources by stopping the introduction, establishment and spread of animal and plant pests and noxious weeds in the United States and residents can really help in that regard by being observant and reporting anything unusual to APHIS."

Anyone who is aware of potential smuggling of prohibited exotic fruits, vegetables, meat, meat products, or GAS into or through the United States is urged to contact the confidential APHIS anti-smuggling hotline at 800-877-3835 or via email at SITC.Mail@aphis.usda.gov. Every attempt will be made to protect the confidentiality of any

information sources during an investigation, within the extent of the law.

U.S. customs agriculture specialists also recently seized 20 foot-long live millipedes in a package marked "toy car model" at San Francisco International Airport. The millipedes were found in mesh bags with soil and paper, when agents noticed the deception on x-ray. Giant millipedes were once common in the U.S. pet trade and sold for as little as \$5.00 each. The price for specimens now tops \$150.00 per millipede.

The online trade in exotic animals and plants can be a major pathway of introduction. People sometimes purchase exotics as novelties, but when the newness wears off, what becomes of the animal or plant? Maybe the plant is introduced into an environment without its natural controls and becomes a rapidly spreading weed. *Hydrilla verticillata* was probably brought to the Tampa and Miami, Florida areas as an aquarium plant in the late 1950s; by the 1970s, the plant now out competes native plants, choking waterways.

Exotic insects require a Plant Protection Quarantine Permit 526; however the ova and larval stages are readily purchased through online sources. There are strict protocols that must be met before keeping these potential pests. In addition to a PPQ 526 permit, caging must be secure and all debris removed from the cage must be frozen for at least 72 hours.

Indian walking sticks now inhabit California landscapes as a result of their escape from captivity or through discarding of eggs. Indian walking stick insects produce viable eggs without mating and broadcast them in their cages or containers; the eggs become commingled with their droppings (frass). The eggs are difficult to distinguish from frass and are easily tossed out in the process of cleaning the cage. Owners of walking stick pets must

be responsible for understanding the biology of these organisms and caring for them properly, which includes bagging the cage debris and disposing of it in the trash.

While the majority of pests enter the country accidentally, a small percentage enters through the illegal pet trade. So our next major pest may be as close as someone ordering an exotic "pet" online and not following procedures. One they tire of the novelty the animal may simply be dumped out of an open window.



giant East African snail
Achatina fulica
Photo by Brian Little



African Giant Black Millipede
Archispirostreptus gigas
Photo by Greg Chrislip