

Florida eliminates giant snail that can eat houses

October 7 2021, by Chris Perkins



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It's an 8-inch master of disaster: a snail that can eat the stucco off your house and give you meningitis.

But it's been eliminated from Florida. Again.

Officials announced Wednesday that the giant African land snail has been eradicated from Florida for the second time.

"This truly is an exciting day for our state and for our country," Florida Agriculture Commissioner Nikki Fried said.

In Florida, the African land snail existed largely in Miami-Dade County, although hundreds of the pests were found in Broward County, specifically western Davie, in 2014.

The snail is a threat on many levels considering it carries a parasite that can cause meningitis in humans, eats 500 types of plants and eats stucco walls.

"It'll eat your plants, and it'll eat your house," said Trevor Smith, director of the division of plant industry and a Florida State Plant Regulatory official.

The snails could be brought here intentionally or unintentionally, Fried said, and they have major implications when it comes to Florida's trade and exports.

"Our trade partners do not want this pest," Smith said, "so it was absolutely imperative that we come in and eradicate this thing so it didn't impact our [international trade](#)."

The first Giant African land snail was found near Douglas Park in Miami, site of Wednesday's announcement. In 1966, a child brought three to South Florida from Hawaii. His grandmother threw them out in the yard, and they reproduced by the thousands but were eradicated by 1975.

Smith said it's unclear how the recent wave of the snails got to Florida in 2011. A colony of the enormous mollusks were discovered in 2014 around a house in western Davie.

The snails come out when it rains, they're most active at night, and they routinely bury themselves 6 to 8 inches in the soil, making them so tough to find Florida had to train two dogs to sniff out the creatures. Since 2011, the state has collected more than 168,000 of the snails.

Smith said to consider a species eradicated or eliminated, it must be three years since the last live one was spotted. The last live giant African land snail was reported in 2017.

"I'm happy to say there's still only one place on earth where the Giant African land snail has been eradicated," Smith said, "and now we've done it twice."

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