

'Voracious' giant snails spark alarm in Venezuela

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Giant African snails are plucked from a garden in Maracaibo, Venezuela.

A "plague" of giant African snails that pose potential health risks to humans is causing alarm in Venezuela where sustained rains have

facilitated their proliferation.

The first colonies of the sub-Saharan *Achatina fulica* snail were discovered at the beginning of November on the shores of Lake Maracaibo in western Venezuela.

Since then, more [snails](#) have been found in [agricultural areas](#) in the region, as well as in neighboring Tachira state.

"Specific sites have been verified... where approximately 350 to 400 snails are being collected per day," Rafael Ramirez, the mayor of the city of Maracaibo, told AFP.

He said authorities were working hard combat the snails.

The giant African snail is considered an [invasive species](#) because of its reproductive capacity—up to 600 eggs every two weeks—and its relatively long lifespan of six years on average.

It can be devastating to crops and also carries parasites that can cause meningitis, encephalitis and intestinal disorders in humans.

The snail has been present in Venezuela since 1997 with the last plague detected in 2017 although in smaller quantities, said Jose Sandoval, director of wildlife at the Azul Ambientalista NGO.

"This will be unstoppable because they are big and already adults: They have already laid eggs," said Sandoval.



Giant African snails crawl on a plant in a garden in Maracaibo, Venezuela.

"We are faced with an invasion, a [plague](#), and so it is hard to eradicate them when they reach these numbers, but they can be controlled."

Sandoval took AFP on an eradication mission in Maracaibo in which he collected 437 snails in just two hours.

He said the prolonged rainy season was to blame for the snails' reappearance and rapid reproduction.

"They will remain until March, they will damage crops... they are voracious," he added.

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