

**A giant specimen of *Archachatina marginata* (Gastropoda Pulmonata: Achatinidae)**

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A giant shell of *Archachatina marginata* (Swainson, 1821), measuring 213 x 124 mm, is reported from SW. Cameroon. This is probably the largest shell of a recent land snail ever recorded. Key words: Gastropoda, Pulmonata, Achatinidae, *Archachatina marginata*, shell size, giant specimen, Cameroon.

The family Achatinidae is well known to embrace the largest living land snails on earth (Bequaert, 1950). Especially some species of the genera *Achatina* s.l. occasionally have shells of over 200 mm in length. According to Prof. Mead's notes the largest species is *A. reticulata* Pfeiffer, 1845, the largest known shell of which measures 209 x 94 mm. The second largest species is *A. achatina* (Linné, 1758), with shells up to 205 mm. An exceptionally large shell of the species known as *the giant African snail*, *A. fulica* (Bowdich, 1822), is 200 mm high.

*Archachatina marginata* (Swainson, 1821) also has impressive shells, but so far ranks only fourth on the list of record species with a shell of unknown provenance of 190 x 103 mm. During field work in 1995 and 1996 in SW. Cameroon I frequently found this species alive, both in native forests and in plantations. When I showed my largest specimen (159 x 92 mm) to some villagers of Nyangong (2°58'N 10°45'E), they claimed to know of a much bigger one. I was directed to a house, where a truly giant shell of *A. marginata* was exhibited by the proud owner, who told that it was collected 'a long time ago' by one of his ancestors in the vicinity of the village of Nyangong, and had been in the possession of the family since. Nevertheless the shell was offered for sale, and, somewhat reluctantly, I bought it.

This giant specimen (figs. 1-2) measures 213 x 124 mm, and is probably the largest, and most voluminous, shell of a recent land snail ever recorded. It has 7.1 whorls, and weighs 390 g. Up to somewhat over 5 whorls the growth has been normal, but after that there are numerous growth irregularities, probably marks of breaks and subsequent repairs. Also peculiar is the strongly curved columella, which is much more straight in all other specimens examined. Because the outer lip is damaged, it is not possible to see whether the animal had formed the outwardly expanding labrum characteristic of fully mature specimens.

The cause of the conspicuous pattern of growth irregularities is unclear. In the forest I found this species to be largely arboreal. Occasionally specimens were observed 10-15 m high up in the trees. Perhaps this specimen had some disability, as a result of which it repeatedly fell out of the trees. Other specimens observed had few or no marks of shell repairs.

I am greatly indebted to Prof. A.R. Mead, who provided me with his notes on maximum shell size in the Achatinidae.

## REFERENCES

- BEQUAERT, J.C., 1950. Studies in the Achatininae, a group of African land snails. — Bull. Mus. comp. Zool. Harvard 105: 1-216.



Figs. 1-2. Different views of shells of a 'normal' (left) and the giant (right) specimen of *Archachatina marginata*. Photographs taken in Nyangong (Cameroon).