

# Human Dimension of Giant African Snails in Barbados

By Clara Dell

Since 2000, *Achatina folicata*, an invasive snail species (Giant African Snails or GAS, for short) have spread throughout the Caribbean and the island of Barbados. They have earned a wholly negative reputation, as they do major damage to farms and gardens and may also be vectors of parasites.



Two typical giant African snails (GAS)

<http://www.maine.gov/agriculture/pi/images/pests/African-snail-2.jpg>

As a McGill student studying both anthropology and environment, specifically interested in the relationship between humans and animals, I was selected to study the relationship between Barbadians and the GAS, particularly with respect to their participation in the Bounty System. This bounty has been set at \$0.50 per pound of GAS delivered to the Ministry of Agriculture (pers. comm. Gibbs, 2012).

My research was primarily on invasive species, animals as human food, and human-animal relationships. I also conducted a survey to discover Barbadian attitudes towards the Bounty system. The survey group was 60 men and women, over the age of 18, from various parishes. Survey respondents

were approached at three market locations (Brighton, Cheapside, and Holder's) and at the University of the West Indies' Cave Hill campus (UWI) and McGill's Bellairs Research Institute (academic and administrative staff from both institutions).

My research determined that negative attitudes toward invasive species are the result of many factors. Two of these key factors are the physical appearance of the species and the damage to property incurred by the species (McNeely, 2001). On both of these criteria the GAS fare quite negatively. They are relatively small, dirty creatures that crawl on the ground and eat nearly every type of crop and thus commit major damage to property (Pollard et. al., 2009). Furthermore, as a fairly religious culture, Barbadians probably heed the warning in the Bible that touching snails makes one unclean (Leviticus 11:29-32, American King James Version). Last but not least, these snails are suspected to pose health threats to those who handle them, deeming them even more undesirable (pers. comm. Donnelly, 2012). These attitudes are very difficult to change.

Despite the large number of respondents, survey answers were not especially varied. Everyone admitted to strongly disliking the snails and killing them when found on their property. The vast majority of respondents did not participate in the Bounty System, although most were involved in killing snails. The key difference in survey responses was dependent on where the participants lived. Respondent farmers disliked GAS because they crawled all over crops, soiled them and limited profits, thereby inhibiting a farmer's livelihood. The main complaint from respondent householders without farms, was simply that

the GAS were “unattractive, dirty, and everywhere”.



Me distributing my survey at Brighton market. Photo taken by BITS student Heather Cross, June 2012.

In conclusion, because people are disgusted by the GAS, they are unwilling to participate in the major national eradication method, the Bounty System. Although homeowners are killing snails on their own property, through lack of widespread participation in the Bounty System, GAS remain prevalent and may cause even more disgust from Barbadians; a vicious circle.

Understanding the human dimension of an invasive species is very important towards providing insight into potential control measures. In terms of national involvement in the Bounty System, public opinion is against handling GAS, and contributes to a general lack of participation. However, the population agrees that GAS should be eliminated and many are fully active towards that goal.

### References Cited

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- Pers. Comm.: Danielle Donnelly, 2012
- Pers. Comm.: Ian Gibbs, 2012

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