

# Volume I, Number 7

## MORE ON SANIBEL'S TREE SNAILS

(If you're a first time reader, for background on this article, please first read the original tree snail story which may be found in the archives [Vol. I, No. 4].)

**T**O DATE, I'VE MADE THREE EXPEDITIONS into the steamy wilds of Sanibel Island, carrying out my personal quest to determine the population status of two introduced tree snail species. The interesting snails were discussed earlier in Volume I, Number 4, of this Newsletter. These two different snails are the banded tree snail (genus *Orthalicus*) and the Florida tree snail (genus *Liguus*).

The first of my forays occurred on June 18th, but it was completely unsuccessful because of the delay in the beginning of our region's traditional daily rain cycle. Springtime drought inhibits tree snail activity, as does wintertime cold. Precipitation and an increase in humidity, coupled with warming temperatures, are the environmental factors that trigger the resumption of the snail's summer-long active period. On a second trip, on 16 July, two live snails were found. My neighbor, snail-hunting novice Mike Bartlow, was with me and he spotted the first, a Lig (beginner's luck!), and I found the second snail just moments later, about ten feet away. Both individuals are pictured and discussed below.

I revisited the locale alone on 13 August, (the third anniversary of Hurricane Charley) and I found two active snails about three feet apart. Shadow and angle conditions allowed me to photograph only one of the individuals, so only the first snail's image is included in this update. It now appears that at least one of these snail species, and possibly the other, have indeed been successful reproductively and have survived as a viable population for over forty-four years despite the frosty temperatures of cold winters, ongoing seasonal droughts, and recent multiple hurricanes.

Of special interest to me is the fact that three of the four tree snails I observed were found on lobes of night-blooming cereus. Ecologically, in their typical habitat many miles south in Monroe County the Ligs prefer smooth-barked trees, i.e., Jamaica dogwood, wild tamarind, and a variety of stoppers. In the past, the Sanibel tree snails were observed using stoppers, and mastics (both on saplings and high in the canopy of mature trees — pre-Charley). It appears the slick epidermis of cereus may contain sufficient populations of algae, fungi, and small lichens to support the dietary lifestyle of the Ligs.



**A beautiful yellow color variant of the Florida tree snail. This form is *Liguus fasciatus aurantius* brought from Pinecrest to Sanibel Island, in 1963. Photographed by the author on Sanibel Island, 07/16/07.**



**It was difficult to accurately determine the identity of this particular snail at the time of observation, or even later by examining the photograph. The specimen was in a tangle and not approachable. This image was taken with a low-power telephoto at its maximum extension. Based on its size, shape, and color, I'll take a chance and identify it as a hybrid between *Liguus* and *Orthalicus*. Such has been documented elsewhere. Photographed by the author on Sanibel Island, 07/16/07.**



**This Lig represents the more common color form, and is basically the same in appearance as the majority of those that were introduced to Sanibel Island, in 1963. The Pinecrest Loop populations contained this form (*Liguus fasciatus barbouri*) as well as other Lig subspecies (see the suggested link below). At the time of collection all cohabited the same hardwood hammock. Scientists have generously split this species into many subspecific forms. Depending on the reference source, there are between 48 and 60 existing and classified color forms (subspecies) of this tree snail in Florida. You'll notice when you look at the suggested link that any one form may have a variety of color variations, thus classification is sometimes difficult.**

For an outstanding Florida tree snail site, I suggest you visit the Lig collection at: <http://www.jaxshells.org/liguus.htm>

Long live Sanibel's tree snails!

Charles LeBuff  
September 1, 2007