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On the presence of *Helix lucorum* Linnaeus, 1758 (Mollusca, Gastropoda, Helicidae) in Le Vesinet, a western suburb of Paris

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Résumé — L'escargot turc *Helix lucorum* est signalé d'un jardin au Vésinet (Ile-de-France, France). Cette espèce introduite semble être présente dans plusieurs autres jardins dans cette zone périurbaine. Par ailleurs, d'autres populations peuvent être attendues dans d'autres régions de France et d'Europe où des spécimens vivants d'*Helix lucorum* sont vendus pour la consommation.

Mots clés — Mollusca, Gastropoda, Helicidae, *Helix lucorum*, espèce exotique, France.

Abstract — The Turkish snail *Helix lucorum* is reported from a garden in Le Vesinet (Paris, France). This introduced species seems to be present in a number of gardens in that suburb. Additional populations may be expected in other areas of France and elsewhere in Europe where living specimens of *Helix lucorum* are sold on markets and in shops.

Key-words — Mollusca, Gastropoda, Helicidae, *Helix lucorum*, exotic species, France.

The Turkish snail ("Escargot Turc") *Helix lucorum* Linnaeus, 1758 is considered an introduced species in France (Falkner *et al.* 2002). It reached France already in 1883 when M. Roy brought this species from Italy and established a colony in Moulin-à-Vent near Lyon (Locard & Germain 1904; Germain 1929 & 1931). A specimen from that introduced colony, dating to the first years of its establishment, is present in the former collection of G.S. Coen, which forms now part of the National Natural History Collections of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (HUJ 52881).

Today this species is still present at several localities in the Lyon district (Chevallier 1974a & 1975; Daguzan 1989), among others in a plot bordering the road going up the Esses hill near La Croix-Rousse. *Helix lucorum* seems to have established viable populations also elsewhere in France especially in the Continental and Mediterranean regions, while it is only occasionally reported from the Alpine and Pyrenean regions (Falkner *et al.* 2002). Here and there experiments are carried out in France to breed *Helix lucorum* for a commercial base (Chevallier 1983)

It has not been recorded so far from the Atlantic region including Paris (Falkner *et al.* 2002). Therefore the find of a living specimen adhering to the wall of a wooden garden house in Le Vesinet (Figure 1), a western suburb of Paris, by one of us (OZ) on 27 September 2009, was a real surprise. This specimen (Figure 1) forms now part of the Mollusc Collection of the National Collections of Natural History of the Tel Aviv University (TAU MO 65981). In another part of the garden several broken shells were seen. The owners of the property in Le Vesinet have been living there for more than 30 years and during that time they never released any snails in their garden. However during the last couple of years they have regularly seen numerous additional specimens of the Turkish snail in gardens elsewhere in the neighbourhood.

The establishment of *Helix lucorum* in France is without doubt due to the fact that living specimens are offered for sale in shops and on markets. Since the early sixties large quantities of living snails are being imported into France because the demand for local edible snails became much larger than the supply. First they were imported from neighbouring countries later on especially from Turkey (Chevallier 1974b). For example between 1969 and 1971 about 2000 tons of living snails (mainly *Helix lucorum*) were imported annually from Turkey (Lecomte 1974). In Turkey adult individuals, entering the reproductive state of development, show a mean weight of about 10 g but very large, grown up specimens may reach a weight of 37.5 g (Yildirim *et al.* 1999). If the mean weight of field collected specimens is about 15 g then the annual amount of specimens caught in the wild during those years and exported from Turkey to France reached the amazing number of 130 million! In the meantime the wild stock of *Helix lucorum* has been reduced strongly (Baran & Kumlutaş 1992). This investigation has resulted in some proposals to prevent the extinction of it in Turkey. According to Yildirim *et al.* (2004) it has still to be considered a vulnerable species although it is the most abundant among the edible land snails in Turkey. In spite of the results of these surveys it is still being collected in the wild by peasants and exported in large numbers to Western European countries.



Figure 1 — **Left** Wooden garden house in Le Vesinet, a western suburb of Paris where living specimens of *H. lucorum* were collected. **Right** One specimen collected at this locality.

In the past *Helix lucorum* was usually transported by train to France and according to personal information supplied by the late Ir. L.J.M. Butot (1918-2008), who studied the distribution of *Helix pomatia* Linnaeus, 1758 in the Netherlands for numerous years, often a part of the snails did not survive the long journey and sometimes the bad smelling snails were simply discarded along the railroad tracks. Among these snails were often still living ones which might have succeeded in establishing flourishing populations at such places. However, so far we have searched the literature in vain for some more detailed information concerning such events.

The establishment of viable populations of the introduced "Escargot Turc" *Helix lucorum* has not remained confined to France. The presence of a population in a garden in Kaposvár, Hungary, has been reported by Varga (1995). The original specimens were imported from Vitosia, Bulgaria. Reinink (2005) described a viable population in an empty plot of waste ground in the town of Zwolle, the Netherlands, but failed to trace the origin of these specimens, while most recently Larraz Azcárate (2010) recorded a population of it in Navarra, Spain, which was most probably established by means of introduced Italian specimens.

As long as living specimens of *Helix lucorum* are readily offered on markets and in shops we may expect the establishment of additional populations of the "Escargot Turc" in gardens in towns and villages throughout France and other countries where these snails are for sale.

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