

DISTRIBUTION, POTENTIAL SPREAD, AND ECOLOGICAL IMPACTS OF THE INVASIVE APPLE SNAIL, *Pomacea insularum*, IN GEORGIA

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Abstract. Established populations of invasive apple snails have been documented in seven southeastern states, including Georgia. Based on recent morphological and genetic analyses, the invasive apple snails collected in Georgia thus far have been identified as *Pomacea insularum*, the island apple snail. *P. insularum* is an herbivorous gastropod native to slow-flowing rivers and wetlands of South America. Several species of apple snails are popular aquarium pets, and *P. insularum* was most likely introduced to the U.S. via aquarium releases. *P. insularum* has a deep, channeled suture and often exceeds 100 mm in height. Island apple snails lay conspicuous bright pink egg masses on emergent vegetation, which commonly exceed 2000 eggs per clutch. Dense populations of invasive snails are often associated with an absence of aquatic plants, high nutrient concentration, and high phytoplankton biomass in the affected aquatic system. UGA and GA DNR have initiated a project to map the current distribution of *P. insularum* in Georgia and to evaluate the possible spread and impact of this species on Georgia's aquatic ecosystems.