

Oregon Pest Alert

Eastern Heath Snail

Xerolenta obvia (Stylommatophora: Hygromiidae), also known as the Eastern heath snail (EHS), is originally from Europe. Although it has NOT been found in Oregon at this time, the risk of introduction is high due to its establishment in several areas in North America. It was found in Ontario, Canada in 1969 and Detroit, Michigan in 2001. In 2012 the snail was detected in Cascade County, Montana.



A typical Eastern heath snail.
Dr. Jan Vaněk at <http://www.biolib.cz/cz/image/id197670/>

While EHS feeds on a wide variety of plants, the primary reason it is considered a pest is the behavior of climbing up on plants and other objects during the summer months. They climb onto forage, wheat, and other crops resulting in contamination of the commodity. EHS population densities may be very high; 70 to 100 snails per square foot have been reported (White-McLean 2011). The combination of climbing and large numbers may result in damage to seed and grain harvesting equipment.

Signs of infestation

- White, dime-sized snails that usually have at least one brown spiral band
- Pale snails attached to plants, fence posts, or other objects during summer days. Any species exhibiting this behavior is most likely an exotic species.



Xerolenta obvia.

T. Shahan, Oregon Department of Agriculture



Snails in hay field in Montana.
Ian Foley, Montana Department of Agriculture.



Common shell color variations.
Francisco Welter Schultes, Zoologisches Institut
at http://www.animalbase.uni-goettingen.de/animalbaseimage/Xerolenta-obvia_02.jpg



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Over 350 pounds of the dime-sized snails were collected in a “snail roundup” near Belt Montana.

Ian Foley, Montana Department of Agriculture

It poses a threat to many mechanically harvested crops, but especially small grains where machinery is most vulnerable to damage. It is known to feed on fodder crops (alfalfa, clover, etc.), and within Europe, it is intercepted on fruit and vegetable shipments (White-McLean 2011). It is a vector of fungal pathogens (*Fusarium*, *Phytophthora*, etc.) and is a vector of sheep and goat parasites (White-McLean 2011).

How could it get here?

During dry hot periods EHS climbs up on and attaches itself to just about any inanimate object including fence posts, firewood, cars, trucks, trailers, railroad cars, shipping containers and campers, or even crop plants and nursery stock. The snail could easily be transported to Oregon on any of these objects.

Description

These are small snails up to 22mm (0.86 inches) in width. They are often described as being dime-sized or smaller. The snails are white, usually with at least one brown spiral band, but there may not be any bands or there may be additional, typically fainter, bands.

Life cycle

Eggs hatch in fall. Snails develop over one to two years depending on climate, and lay eggs in the fall. Each adult can lay up to 95 eggs in the soil (Mañas 2011). Like most snails, adults have both male and female genitalia; therefore all adults can produce eggs. Adults die in the fall after reproducing.

References

Mañas, M. 2011. Mating of *Xerolenta obvia*. Gastropods: Blog about gastropods. <http://gastropods.wordpress.com/tag/xerolentaobvia/> accessed April 2014.

White-McLean, J.A. (September, 2011). Terrestrial Mollusc Tool. USDA/APHIS/PPQ Center for Plant Health Science and Technology and the University of Florida. [April 2014] - <http://idtools.org/id/mollusc>

If you see snails attached to plants in the summer or think you have found a eastern heath snail, please contact ODA.

Thank you for your interest!

For further information please contact:

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Snails attached to a caution sign in a field.

Ian Foley, Montana Department of Agriculture



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