Wild Pigs

Prepared by the National Wildlife Control Training Program. http://WildlifeControlTraining.com
Researched-based, certified wildlife control training programs to solve human – wildlife conflicts.
Your source for animal handling, control methods, and wildlife species information.

Figure 1. Wild pig (*Sus scrofa*). Picture courtesy of US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

Species Overview

Conflicts

Wild pigs damage turf, crops, and landscapes by their rooting, wallows, and rubs. They also predate on native species. In addition, wild pigs vector several diseases that can infect wildlife, livestock, and humans.

Legal Status

In South Carolina, there is no closed hunting season for wild hogs on private lands with a valid hunting license during daylight hours. Hogs can be hunted at night only on a registered property on which the person has a lawful right to hunt. A property maybe registered online at www.dnr.sc.gov/nighthunt.

With the exception of snares, there is no restrictions on the trapping of hogs on private property. Night hunting is not allowed on Wildlife Management Areas. See the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources Rules and Regulations online for more information.

Identification

Wild pigs (*Sus scrofa*) include both feral hogs (domestic swine that have escaped captivity) and wild boars (Figure 1). Wild boars are native to Eurasia but were introduced to North America to interbreed with feral hogs. Wild boars and feral hogs hybridize freely, therefore, the term wild pig is appropriate as a generic term for these animals.

Physical Description

The size and shape of wild pigs depend on the breed, degree of hybridization with wild boars, and level of nutrition during the growing period. Males tend to be larger than females. The length of adults ranges from 50 to 75 inches,

and weight ranges from 75 to 250 pounds. Pigs larger than the average tend to be the result of feeding by humans. Wild boars have longer legs and larger heads with longer snouts than feral hogs. As with domestic hogs, hybrids may be any color. The color of young boars generally is red-brown with black longitudinal "watermelon" stripes. As juveniles develop, the stripes disappear and color changes from red to brown to black. Male feral hogs and wild boars have tusks that are continuously growing.

Species Range

The first documented introduction to the US was in Florida by Hernando de Soto in 1539. Populations of unclaimed hogs increased and spread throughout the Southeast. European wild boars were released at Hooper Bald, North Carolina, in 1912.

Wild pigs currently are found throughout the southeastern US from Texas to Florida. They also are found in California, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. Scattered populations occur across much of the US.

Health and Safety Concerns

Wild pigs are hosts to cholera, swine brucellosis, trichinosis, bovine tuberculosis, foot and mouth disease, African swine fever, and pseudorabies. All may be transmitted to livestock from wild pigs.

Swine brucellosis is a bacterial disease that causes abortions in pigs. Humans can contract swine brucellosis by contact with infected animals. If you develop flu-like symptoms, inform medical authorities that you have worked with feral hogs.

Pseudorabies is a herpes virus that diminishes the health of swine and leads to abortions in sows. Feral hogs spread the virus through nasal and oral discharges. While not contagious to humans, pseudorabies can kill dogs, livestock, and wildlife.

Always wear disposable gloves when handling, field dressing, cleaning, and butchering a carcass of a wild pig. Avoid direct contact with blood and reproductive organs. Wash hands with soap and hot water for 20 seconds or longer immediately after dressing a wild pig. Burn or bury gloves and remains from wild pigs that have been butchered. Clean all tools and reusable gloves with disinfectant, such as dilute bleach. Thoroughly cook the meat of wild pigs.

General Biology, Reproduction, and Behavior

Reproduction

In ideal conditions, a population of wild pigs can double in just 4 months, but more typically, the annual growth rate in populations of feral hogs is about 20%. Feral hogs may begin to breed before 6 months of age if they have a high-quality diet. Sows usually have one litter per year and young may be born at any time of the year. Litter size depends upon the age of the sow, nutritional intake, and time of year. Litters of feral hogs have three to eight young, but have been as large as 13. Wild boars usually breed at 18 months.

Nesting/Denning Cover

Wild pigs seek water and dense vegetation when temperatures are high. When the weather turns cold, they pile grass and leaves high enough to bury themselves for warmth.

Behavior

Wild pigs are intelligent and adapt readily to changing conditions. They may rapidly modify their responses to humans. Wild boars have a greater capacity to invade colder and more mountainous terrain than do other wild pigs. Feral pigs are social and form family groups called "sounders." A sounder consists of one or more sows and their offspring. Male pigs tend to be solitary. The home range of wild pigs

depends on the availability of food, but typically is 0.3 to 3 square miles.

During hot weather or if hunting pressure is great, wild pigs remain in the shade in wallows during the day and feed at night. Wild pigs cool themselves in wallows by rolling in mud and then use trees or posts, called rubs, to scrape off the mud. In cold weather, they feed during the warmest parts of the day.

Habitat

A variety of habitats, from tidal marshes to mountain ranges, is suitable for wild pigs. They prefer the cover of dense brush or marsh vegetation. In general, they are restricted to areas below snowline and above freezing temperatures, although populations are expanding northward in the US. Wild pigs frequent livestock-production areas. They prefer mast-producing hardwood forests but also feed in conifer forests. In remote areas, or where human activity is minimal, they may use open range or pastures, particularly at night.

Food Habits

Wild pigs are omnivores. Types of food vary greatly depending on the location and time of year, but plants make up about 85% of their diet. Acorns or other mast, when available, make up a good portion of the diet. Wild pigs gather in oak forests when acorns fall and generally do not wander far from the forest during this period. In winters of poor mast production, wild pigs increase their range and consume greater quantities of underground plant material, herbaceous plants, and invertebrates (worms and insects). They may feed on underground vegetation during wet weather or in areas near streams and underground springs. Wild hogs eat flesh from vertebrates and will prey on bird eggs, but the extent to which animals are taken as prey or carrion is not fully known.

Voice, Sounds, Tracks, and Signs

Wild pigs vocalize with grunts and squeals.

Damage Identification

Damage to Landscapes

The most common complaint of damage from wild pigs is rooting, sometimes called grubbing. Wild pigs can cause considerable damage to lawns or golf courses when rooting for food.

Damage to Crops and Livestock

Damage to farm ponds and watering holes for livestock is common also. Damage to crops and rangeland by wild pigs is easily identified. Rooting in wet or irrigated soil generally is quite visible, but can vary from an area of several hundred square feet to only a few small spots where the ground has been turned over.

Some hogs are highly efficient predators. Depredation to calves and lambs can be difficult to identify because the small animals may be killed and completely consumed, leaving little or no evidence to determine the cause of death.

Hogs typically kill by biting and crushing the skull or neck. Hogs begin to feed on the underside of the lamb, starting at the chest and stomach. After the heart, lungs, liver, stomach, and intestines are removed, a hog will eat the ends of the ribs, break the back, and expose the muscle surrounding a leg. A pig will then consume the backbone area, approaching from the belly side and eat the muscle tissue of the leg. The brain, eyes, and tongue are consumed last. Wild pigs tend to step on the carcass while feeding. The presence of scat will help with identification. Confirmation of predation must occur shortly after death of the prey because pigs also feed on carrion.

Damage to Structures

Wild pigs can cause significant damage to fences when they use them as rub posts. They may damage fences when entering gardens.

Damage Prevention and Control Methods

Habitat Modification

In general, habitat modification is not practical for the control of wild pigs.

Pregnant ewes, nanny goats, and cows should be moved to areas less frequented by wild pigs. Ewes that have twins are particularly vulnerable, as the young are smaller and maternal protection is divided.

Exclusion

Fences are not practical except in small areas around yards and gardens. Use heavy wire mesh with holes no larger than 6 inches with posts. A single strand of electric wire about 6 inches off the ground may reduce attempts by wild pigs to breach an existing fence.

Two-strand electric fences with one wire at 8 inches and another at 18 inches have been as effective as 3-strand fences in reducing incursions by 50% in one trial. Electric fences, however, can be difficult to maintain over large areas. Hog panels 34 inches in height were very effective in containing wild pigs, even when the pigs were chased.

Frightening Devices

No frightening devices are effective for the control of wild pigs. Harassment through hunting, if legal, may move pigs from an area for limited periods of time.

Repellents

No repellents are registered for the control of wild pigs in the US.

Toxicants

No toxicants are registered for the control of wild pigs in the US.

Shooting

In South Carolina, there is no closed season on wild hogs for private landowners with a valid hunting license during daylight hours. A free depredation permit may be issued to landowners who do not possess a hunting license. Go to www.dnr.sc.gov/ for additional information.

In urban areas, shooting may not be a viable option. Consult your local ordinances before discharging a firearm.

Trapping

Where pig densities are high, use of multiple-catch traps such as corral traps, is the most effective method for control of wild pigs. Single-capture traps are available also but are not as efficient.

When conducting a trapping program, all hunting in the area should cease, especially with the use of dogs, as this may pressure the pigs to move to another area. Persistence and dedication are required for trapping program to be successful.

Check traps daily and replace bait as needed. Recent advances in remote sensing technology allow trappers to monitor traps from a distance via a computer and trigger the trap remotely. If several large pigs are in a trap, the presence of a person or vehicle will frighten them and escapes may occur, even from well-built traps. Ideally, traps should be triggered remotely and only when all members of a sounder are inside a corral-style trap.

Disposition

Relocation

It is illegal to relocate a hog from the wild unless you possess a special permit through the SCDNR. Restrictions apply.

Translocation

Translocation of wild pigs is not permitted.

Euthanasia

A well-placed shot to the head from a high-powered rifle will kill a pig instantly.

In a corral trap, shoot the largest pig first and work your way down to the smaller pigs.

Resources

Government or private agencies, universities, extension service.

Web Resources

http://dnr.sc.gov

http://wildlifecontroltraining.com

http://icwdm.org/

http://wildlifecontrol.info