

# Frequently Asked Questions-Wild Pigs - Coping with Feral Hogs

You Tube Video: Feral – Hog Question and Answers by: Billy Higginbotham

## **1. How many they average per litter and how often they can breed in a year?**

The wild pig is the most prolific large mammal on the face of the Earth—but they are not “born pregnant”! The average is between 5 and 6 pigs per litter. Sows have approximately 1.5 litters per year. Are more litters per year and larger litter sizes possible? Absolutely yes! However, I am using long-term averages, not what can occur under ideal conditions—which usually unsustainable over the long haul. Young females do not typically have their first litter until they are 13+ months of age, even though they can be sexually mature at 6 to 8 months of age or even earlier in some cases.

## **2. What is the average lifespan of a wild pig?**

Mortality rates vary greatly-impacting the very young and the very old primarily. Predation is not a big issue once they reach about 10 to 15 pounds. Hunting can be a significant mortality factor in some regions but generally is not enough to offset population growth. Depending on a variety of these factors, plus disease, vehicle collisions etc., average lifespan is probably between 4 and 8 years of age. The Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service surveyed landowners in 2011 to determine an estimate of how many wild pigs are removed from the Texas landscape each year. We estimated 753,646 wild pigs were removed by landowner-initiated efforts in 2010. This will help refine rate of population growth and population estimate models even more.

## **3. How heavy can they grow to?**

Weights depend on genetic background and food availability. Generally, males can reach larger weights than females but this is not a hard and fast rule. Average weights vary but run 200 pounds for adult males and 175 pounds for adult females. A 300 pound feral hog is a large pig. The unusually large weights of 500 pounds + occasionally reported in the media are very rare.

## **4. What is the power of their bite? What other animal can it be likened to in that regard?**

They have extremely strong jaws to crack open hard-shelled nuts such as hickory nuts and pecans. As they predate upon or scavenge animal carcasses, they can easily break bones and often consume the entire carcass, often leaving little if any sign behind.

### **5. How strong is their sense of smell?**

The wild pig's sense of smell is well developed (much better than both their eyesight and hearing) and they rely strongly on it to detect danger and search out food. They are capable of sensing some odors 5-7 miles away and may be able to detect odors as much as 25 feet underground! Appealing to this tremendous sense of smell is often essentially as fermented or scented baits can provide additional attraction to make them more vulnerable to trapping.

### **6. What are their eating habits, and how much they eat in a day?**

Wild pigs are opportunistic omnivores, meaning they feed on plant and animal matter in addition to being able to play the role of a scavenger. They are largely indiscriminant in their feeding habits and eat both vertebrate and invertebrate animals. Approximately 85% to 90% of their diet is believed to be composed of vegetation (including crops where available) and 10% animal matter. Small pigs may eat approximately 5% of their body weight daily; larger pigs an estimated 3 % of body weight.

### **7. Do you have any documented proof of their violent nature?**

#### **(Newspaper clippings)**

Ample documentation exists of wild pig-human encounters. However, the likelihood of a human being impacted by a hog/vehicle collision or disease risk—while still low is greater than an actual physical attack by a wild pig. Where the rare wild pig attack occurs, it is usually during a hunting scenario where dogs are used to bay or corner a pig in a spot and the pig “runs through” the associated hunters standing nearby. Occasionally, humans inadvertently walk between a sow and her litter and the sow reacts to protect her young. Totally unprovoked attacks outside of these two scenarios are rare. Given a choice, wild pigs usually flee rather than fight. However, U.S. newspapers report from 5 to 7 human fatalities each year.

### **10. If impaled by a wild pig's tusk, what disease could you get from one?**

Most likely, a human would be subject to an infection just as you would from suffering any deep cut or abrasion from any unclean surface.

### **11. How fast can they run and high can they jump?**

Wild pigs can run up to 30 mph. They can jump over fences less than 3 feet high and have “climbed” out of pig traps with walls 5 to 6 feet high. Therefore, traps with 90 degree corners must be covered on top because the pigs tend to pile up in that corner and literally climb over each other— and the corner gives enough leverage for them to go over the top. Either use a 5 foot high trap with no corners (circular or tear-drop shaped) or cover the corners/top of the trap.

## **12. How do they sleep? (habits...i.e. burrow a den? Standing up?)**

Wild pig can simply lie down and sleep, usually on their sides. They will actually construct “nests” that they use for sleeping as well as farrowing. Some are very simple depressions and others can be quite elaborate. Oftentimes, they simply seek out thick underbrush for security or root into a brush pile or downed tree top for security. In the hot months, they will often lie in mud and/or seek deep shade.

## **13. How hard they are to kill?**

How hard are they to kill with what? Very hard with a sling shoot or BB gun! Seriously, most archers shoot wild pigs in the heart /lung region immediately behind the shoulder from broadside or at a slightly quartering away angle. Hunters using firearms are advised to shoot the pigs in the neck or in the vitals (heart/lung region). Preferred rifles for pigs are 25 to 30 caliber. Regardless of the caliber/weapon, shot placement is essential for a clean and ethical kill. Archers typically limit their shots to 25-30 yards to help ensure a clean kill.

## **14. What other animal would you liken their intelligence level to, and ability to learn to avoid traps?**

Wild pigs are one of the most intelligent species (exotic or native) found in the United States. They learn to avoid danger very quickly and “half-hearted” attempts to control them just make them less susceptible to future control efforts. They respond to human pressure via avoidance.

## **15. What is the average cost of property damage they inflict in Texas? Total cost of annual property damage?**

A 2004 survey conducted by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service placed annual damage to agriculture in TX alone at \$52 million with an additional \$7 million spent by landowners to attempt to control the pigs and/or correct the damage. This is indeed a very conservative estimate. Other researchers suggest that damage per pig per year averages \$200— but the problem there is that the assumption is made that a 40 pound pig causes as much damage as a 300 pound pig, which is unlikely. The total

pig population in Texas has been estimated recently (2011) at 2.6 million. However, estimates for the United States population as a whole are non-existent but “guesstimates” place that number between 4 million and 8 million animals. Some reports estimate total damage in the U.S. may be \$1.5 billion annually—However, these damage estimates are in part based on population estimates—but again, a figure we don’t have a good handle on nationwide.

## **16. Do they use the same trails to get from place to place? If so, why?**

Wild pigs are creatures of habit and will use the same bedding/resting areas and feeding areas as long as the food source remains available. However, they are capable of moving great distances to find food. Human disturbance/pressure will make them alter their patterns of movement. They do have some affinity to their “home range” which can vary from a few hundred acres to several thousand acres based on food availability and pressure. A 2011-12 telemetry study of adult female wild pigs with sounders in east Texas resulted in home range estimates of approximately 2 square miles, or 1,100 acres.

## **17. What so they do to damage trees specifically?**

The most sensitive environmental areas wild pigs damage are wetland areas and they can alter the vegetative community present. They compete with native wildlife for hard mast (e.g., acorns from oak trees). Their rooting can accelerate leaf litter decomposition causing the loss of nutrients which can impact seedling survival of trees. Their rooting behavior can damage seedling tree growth and survival. Longleaf pine seedlings seem to be especially vulnerable to wild pigs. Research suggests that the pigs may actually root up seedlings of various tree species and chew the root system to obtain nutrients. They rub against individual trees (pines) that are capable of producing a lot of rosin (presumably as they rub to remove ectoparasites on their skin). Rubbing of selected pine trees has resulted in girdling of some mature trees which can eventually kill the tree.

## **18. Are older boars loners? If so why do we think that?**

If you see a large wild pig traveling alone, 101 times out of 100 it is a boar. The mature boars become more solitary, or sometimes travel with a small number of other large boars. They only join up with sounders when a sow comes into heat.

## **19. When does a sow abandon its litter and when do they separate?**

Within a few days of giving birth, a pregnant sow will leave the group in order to farrow. They may remain apart for 2 to 4 weeks then rejoin the group. We have

observed piglets actively feeding on solid food (e.g., shelled corn) at only 2 weeks of age! The sows really don't "abandon" their litter over time. A "sounder" is a family group of pigs made up of sows (typically related via about 3 generations) and their piglets. Pigs are completely weaned by about 3 months of age, although they have been observed eating solid food (e.g., corn) at as young as 2 weeks of age. About 80% of the yearling females remain with the sounder and the rest disperse. Young males disperse from the sounder at about 16 to 18 months of age. There is some research that supports the idea that sounders can become territorial— but not the individual pigs.

## **20. What kind of damage are they capable of on a wire fence?**

Wild pigs do a great deal of damage to net wire fences which are generally used to confine sheep and goats. They tear them up or lift them up off the ground to gain access and therefore leave "holes" that sheep and goats can pass through.

## **21. What kind of foods are they most attracted to when trying to trap them?**

One size does not fit all when it comes to baits. However, research by Dr. Tyler Campbell (formerly with USDA-APHIS/WS) suggests that wild pigs are attracted to baits that have a sweet pungent odor, such as strawberry or berry flavorings. Hence, you will see several commercial "pig baits" that contain some type of strawberry flavoring based on this research. Many baits will and have worked and landowners are encouraged to vary baits among traps to find out what pigs find most attractive at a particular location or season. However, the more abundant the food supply, the more difficult it is to attract pigs to these baits. Shelled corn is often used, but landowners have also been successful by fermenting corn, milo, rice, oats, etc. to increase the odor attraction. Old fish grease, catfish "stink" baits and overripe fruit and vegetables have also been used successfully. Others have used maple syrup on corn. Some recent research in the southeast has indicated that while catch rates were no different between shelled corn and soured corn, although we do know from experience that non-target species (e.g., raccoons, deer, crows) use of shelled corn will be much higher than a soured grain product. Please note: We do not advocate the use of diesel on corn to encourage use by wild pigs and discourage use by non-targets such as deer or raccoons because we do not know the full impacts of diesel ingestion by the pigs—some of which may be destined for human consumption. Furthermore, the pouring or contact of diesel on the ground may create an environmental hazard.

## **22. We seem to hear a lot of "things were fine until a year ago" remarks**

## **by people with wild pig issues. Why the seemingly sudden boom in population and fearless invasion of residential neighborhoods?**

I once made the comment that “There are but 2 kinds of landowners in Texas: Those with wild pigs and those that are about to have wild pigs”. They have steadily increased their range by moving northward and westward over the past 25 years. They have also gone from being a rural land/agriculture issue to an urban/suburban issue as well by moving into these more populated areas that are adjacent to adequate habitat that provides cover, security and food. Why the population explosion over this time? Several reasons converged to create the “perfect storm” resulting in the boom.

1) Indiscriminate stocking to new habitats by landowners and hunters facilitated rapid increase—pigs cannot fly but they can be trailered and released. This was done regularly (—DESPITE BEING ILLEGAL) in the 1970’s thru the 1990’s—and the stockings were very successful at re-establishing wild pig populations across the state.

2) Supplementing non-migratory wildlife (deer, turkeys quail etc.) is legal in the state of Texas. For example, an estimated 300 million pounds of shelled corn are fed to deer annually in Texas, along with at least 120,000 million pounds of “protein pellets”. However, non-target species (e.g., wild pigs, raccoons) get their fair share of these supplements. As a result, the sows that are on this higher nutritional plane because of their access to the unintended supplement allows sows to undergo “flushing”: produce more eggs, have larger litters and have more pigs in their litters survive.

3) Wild pigs are the most prolific large mammal on the face of the earth. They are not “born pregnant”, but their high intrinsic (built-in) rate of increase when environmental conditions are favorable can allow for rapid population increases.

Population increases are not just a Texas phenomenon—for various reasons, populations have expanded in many states and now some 36 states have established wild pig populations.

### **23. Where do they originate from?**

Pigs were domesticated some 8,000 to 10,000 years ago. There are believed to be multiple areas of origin in both Europe and Asia. Polynesians brought domesticated pigs into the Hawaiian Islands around 700 A.D. The first pigs were brought into what is now the

continental U.S. into Florida in 1539 by Hernando de Soto. Explorers used these pigs as a traveling food source. After wandering around the southeastern United States in search of gold, his exploration party brought 700 pigs into what would become Texas in 1542.

### **24. What's the difference between a pig, hog and a boar, and are their**

## **different species?**

All are descendants of a common ancestor-the Eurasian wild boar. The term Wild boar is typically used to describe Eurasian wild boar from Europe or Asia. Feral hogs are those that originated from domestic breeds but may be the result of a few or many, many generations in the wild. In the U.S., the best descriptor is probably to refer to them simply as wild pigs. Regardless, the Eurasians and domestics gone feral are largely the same species and therefore will interbreed with no problems resulting in all sorts of “hybrids” between the 2 groups. None of these should be confused with the javelina, a native pig-like mammal found in the American southwest that is not even closely related to wild boars/wild pigs/feral hogs. The best name to use is simply “wild pig”.

## **25. Is there any use their bones, tusks or hair have in objects? (brushes, jewelry, leathers, etc.)**

None that I know of. Their meat is consumed by humans. In fact, from 2004-2009, some 461,000 wild pigs captured in Texas were federally inspected and commercially processed for human consumption in the U.S., Europe and Asia.

## **26. Is it true that they use of mud as sun screen and to keep them cool? Does the mud help them with anything else?**

Pigs have no functioning sweat glands and therefore they can be sensitive to high temperatures. During hot weather, they typically are associated more with cool shady places with water sources and tend to confine their movements at night when temperatures cool down. I don't agree that they are using mud as a sunscreen as much as they are using it to cool off in order to remain comfortable.

## **27. Do sows ever eat their young?**

Never say never—but I would not term it as “common or routine behavior”. There are instances where they have been known to scavenge on pig carcasses.

## **28. How do they interact with other animals? Any they hang with or avoid?**

Most other wildlife species don't associate with wild pigs. The less mobile (lizards, toads, snakes) may end up being their next meal, while others (e.g., white-tailed deer) typically vacate the immediate area when wild pigs show up. They can be competitors with native species for certain food supplies such as acorns and limit the availability of those food sources for less aggressive native species.

**29. Are there methods of communication with each other and how loud is their squeal. Would squealing act as a warning to other pigs of danger?**

Squeals can serve as a means of communicating (between sows and young, as a warning between wild pigs competing over a food source or as a danger warning to other pigs).

**30. Is Swine Flu a legitimate danger from wild pigs, and how abundant is it? (i.e. 1 out of every 10 pigs can spread flu...?)**

NO-Wild pigs do not cause swine flu.

**31. What is the estimated population of wild pigs in all the United States?**

We do not have estimates based on scientific data for the entire U.S, we have guesstimates. Most experts would agree that it is somewhere between 4 million and 8 million animals but this estimate is not based on good data. There is a real need to conduct surveys to establish baseline population data. In Texas at least, these data do exist from 8 studies and thru the use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) an estimate has been made at 2.6 million head. We are also getting a handle on the Texas wild pig population rate of population growth. Based on recent studies, we estimate that annual population growth in Texas is approximately 18-21%. At that rate (if left unchecked), the population would take about 5 years to double in size. However, collectively we are doing everything in our power to make sure the population is not left unchecked.

**31. What is the estimated world population of wild pigs?**

Some countries in Europe and Asia feel they have a better handle on their total populations of pigs and some of these census techniques are just now being employed in the U.S.

**32. What is the estimated annual dollar amount of destruction caused by wild pigs in the entire U.S.?**

Some reports place the total damage figure as high as \$1.5 billion in the U.S. annually. That is based on a damage estimate of approximately \$200 damage per wild pig hog per year and the pig population of 6 million animals. However, if the population estimates (guesstimates) are wrong— so is the total damage estimate. Again, that assumes that all pigs cause the same amount of damage, which is untrue based on their size as well as where they live (e.g., 25 pounder vs. a 250 pounder; lower value rangeland vs. higher value cropland).

**33. Is there some kind of census about the nation's wild pig population?**

**What we're trying to find is how fast the population has grown, and at what rate they are continuing to grow.**

No, there are guesstimates of from 4 to 8 million but researchers are working on finding better methods to estimate populations by state so we can gain a better handle on the total U.S. population. Anything you read in print right now on total U.S. populations is a pure guesstimate that is not based on scientific data. Our research work resulted in an estimated Texas population of about 2.6 million animals as of 2011.

**34. When were wild pigs introduced to our soil?**

1539— In what is now Florida by Hernando de Soto. These 13 pigs were originally domestics released to be used as a future food source by the explorers. De Soto captured these particular pigs in Cuba and brought them into what is now Tampa Bay, Florida. Obviously there were some escapes during the exploration and these pigs became the seed stock for future wild pig/feral hog populations. The wild pig herd that accompanied De Soto's party increased to approximately 700 head by the time the exploration entered into what is now Texas in 1542.

**35. Number of professional wild pig eradication companies in Texas?**

We have no way to track these companies. A number of individuals do offer control services in the state and can be found via internet searches. Those that trap pigs usually retain the right to them market them to a buying station for processing or sell males (boars and barrows) to hunting preserves. Several helicopter services offering aerial hunting for wild pigs are also operating in Texas.

**36. Where are the worst damage problems in Texas?**

Anywhere we have wild pig populations we seem to have problems. From an agriculture standpoint, cropland damage results in higher economic impact than rangelands or pasturelands. More recently, damage to greenscapes in urban and suburban settings have resulted in considerable economic impacts as well.

**37. How many pigs are caught each year?**

The Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service surveyed landowners in the Spring of 2011 to determine how many pigs they removed by all legal means from the Texas landscape in 2010. A total of 697 survey respondents controlling 1.8 million acres from 137 Texas counties removed 36,646 pigs in 2010. Trapping represented 57% of the total and shooting 35%. Dogs removed 6% of the total and snares removed just

2%. Of the “shooting” category, only 11% of the total pigs removed were taken by hunters. Based on this survey, we estimate 753,646 wild pigs are removed each year. We also know that from 2004- 2009, 461,000 hogs were federally inspected prior to slaughter at TX processing plants. These pigs were generally trapped then sold to buying stations. However, this is only a percentage of the pigs kept for home use or taken by hunters. Several studies suggest that annual hunter harvest averages 24% of the population—but these data are also lacking. It takes between 50% and 70% of a population to be controlled annually just to hold the numbers stable from one year to the next (Our population model suggested 66% had to be removed to hold the population stable). Therefore, recreational hunting alone cannot keep a population in check.

### **38. What diseases do they carry and are they harmful to other animals?**

Approximately 15 diseases can be carried by wild pigs. However, swine brucellosis and pseudorabies are two examples of diseases of concern. Recently while testing wild pigs for brucellosis, researchers at Texas Tech documented the presence of tularemia in a large number of hogs tested. Tularemia can be transmitted to other animals and humans, Pseudo can be transmitted to other animals and swine brucellosis can be contracted by humans. Our recommendation is whenever you are field dressing hogs, use proper precautions (latex gloves and eyewear). Obviously, the biggest threat is disease transmission to domestic swine herds.

### **39. What are the different species of pigs typically found in Texas?**

There is but one species (*Sus scrofa*) in the United States— but many breeds are involved as most of our wild pigs today are originally from domestic stock. There are about 8 species of hogs in the genus *Sus* (think of them to 2nd cousins to our wild pigs) but about 18 subspecies of *Sus Scrofa* (1st cousins) found worldwide. All of our modern domestic breeds as well as our wild pigs originated from a common ancestor—the Eurasian wild boar that was first domesticated some 8,000 to 10,000 years ago in Europe and Asia.

### **40. Are inroads being made in the wild pig problem?**

Our Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service 2006-07 study clearly showed that we can reduce the economic impact of wild pigs on agricultural enterprises by 66%. That does not mean we significantly reduced the total population—However, it does show that concerted control efforts can abate damage significantly. Excellent research is being conducted investigating the use of both contraceptives and toxicants that could lead to additional tools for control in the future.

**41. Do Texans understand the severity of the problem?**

At one time, the wild pig issue was strictly considered to be an agriculture/rural issue in Texas. However, over the last decade, wild pigs have increasingly impacted urban/suburban areas of the state—including all the major cities, by damaging greenspaces (i.e., lawns, parks, sports fields) and by increases in vehicular collisions causing damage to vehicles and in some cases humans. More urban Texans are now aware of the issues relative to wild pigs.

**42. Does the nation/Washington D.C . understand the severity of the problem?**

At an Invasive Species Conference held in Washington D.C in 2010, several presentations were made regarding wild pigs and their impacts. So, efforts are being made to spotlight the issue in not only Texas but also in the other 46 or so states they now inhabit.

**43. What are the wild pig's habitat preferences?**

Typically, wild pigs will seek out the heaviest cover near water they can find where they are not harassed, then range out from there to feed. The habitats vary greatly across the range of the feral hog in the United States and even in Texas—from fairly arid regions in south Texas and the trans-Pecos of west Texas all the way to the heavily forested pineywoods and wetlands in eastern Texas. They must have sufficient food, water, cover and living space. If one or more of these requirements are not met, they can be extremely mobile and move to new areas that meet all of their habitat needs.

**44. What impact do wild pigs have on our deer population in Texas?**

Deer hunting in Texas is annually a \$2.2 billion industry. Wild pigs impact white-tailed deer in 3 ways: 1) they compete ( and often out-compete) deer for native mast (e.g., acorns) as a food supply in the Fall, 2) they compete for supplemental food sources (forages, corn fed as bait for hunting and protein supplements) that are meant for deer. We feed 300 million pounds of shelled corn and at least 120 million pounds of protein annually in TX, with a good portion of that feed going to non-target species such as raccoons and wild pigs. Last Fall, shelled wildlife corn had a retail cost of \$20 per 100 pounds (protein costs even more). We are likely making our wild pig population larger by feeding white-tailed deer where they share habitats because of unintended supplement consumption by the pigs. Now, this is Texas and we are not going to stop feeding deer, so we need to exclude feral pigs from deer feeders. The

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service and TAMU-Kingsville conducted a study in 2009 that showed that feeder pens at heights of 28" and 34" effectively denied wild pig access to supplement without significantly impacting deer access. Cost per circular feeder pen is about \$170 for six 16' panels x 34" and 12 t-posts, and 3) deer don't tolerate pigs very well and typically vacate the immediate areas when pigs show up at feeder locations/stations.

#### **45. Which trap doors work best?**

Recent research in Alabama and confirmed in Texas has shown that continuous catch doors (saloon, rooter and swinging door gates) do not continue to catch additional wild pigs once the door is tripped. Therefore, the use of drop (guillotine) gates can be added to the list of effective trap doors or gates. Research in Texas was also being conducted on the width of gate openings. Camera data previously suggested that many adult pigs have an aversion to entering narrower (<3 feet) gate openings. However, research findings did not confirm this. Regardless, wider gates may reduce the training time necessary for adult wild pigs to accept the presence of and enter traps.

#### **46. Are all traps the same?**

Recent research in Georgia has shown that the catch rate in corral traps is 4 times higher than in box traps. Also, boars have exhibited an aversion to entering the smaller box traps. Additional Alabama research found that boars spent an average of 32 minutes per visit to a bait/trap site while sounders spent 70 minutes per visit on average. Also, sounders made twice as many trips to the sites as compared to boars. In Oklahoma, researchers caught more pigs per unit of effort using drop nets as compared to corral traps. They are currently investigate the effectiveness of a "hybrid" trap that combines the attributes of a corral trap and drop net. Regardless, one study showed that 73% of pigs that were trapped and marked were recaptured at a later date. Lastly, one study found that 10 of 12 traps (83%) captured additional pigs within one week of pigs being euthanized in the traps. This suggests that blood left in a trap is not necessarily a deterrent to other pigs.

#### **47. If I capture wild pigs in a trap, what can I do with them?**

In Texas, landowners/trappers can hold live wild pigs for up to 7 days. If they plan to hold them longer than that, the Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC) must inspect and approve the holding facilities being used. According to TAHC regulations, females can be sold to permitted buying stations (check the TAHC website for a complete listing of these facilities) found across the state, which is a good method of

recouping part of one's trapping and damage repair costs. Male wild pigs can be sold to a permitted buying station or a permitted hunting preserve. Of course many landowners/hunters/trappers prefer to process the wild pig for home consumption.

#### **48. What are some other sources of information on wild pigs?**

Three websites that can provide additional information include:

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension's wild pig website: <https://feralhogs.tamu.edu>

National Wild Pig Community of Practice website: [www.extension.org/feral\\_hogs](http://www.extension.org/feral_hogs)

Texas A&M AgriLife Research and Extension Center at Overton:

<http://overton.tamu.edu>

#### **49. Do all states have wild pigs?**

We have recently classified the states with wild pigs into various categories for management planning purposes. Fourteen states currently do not have wild pigs: AK, CT, DE, ME, MD, MA, MN, MT, ND, RI, SD, VT, WA, and WY. Eight states have small isolated populations: CO, ID, IA, NE, NV, NH, NJ and UT. Four states have established but stable populations: IN, KS, WV and IL. Thirteen states have established and increasing populations: AZ, KY, MI, MS, MO, NM, NY, NC, OH, OR, PA, VA and WI. Eleven states have large well-established and growing populations: AL, AR, CA, FL, GA, HI, LA, OK, SC, TN and TX.

#### **50. Do I need a hunting license to take wild pigs in Texas?**

The answer depends on your intent. If you are a landowner or a designated agent of a landowner removing wild pigs by any legal means in order to abate damage, then a hunting license is not required. However, if you are taking wild pigs for meat and/or for recreation (e.g., hunting), then a valid Texas hunting license is required. This would also apply to trapping, snaring or dogging.

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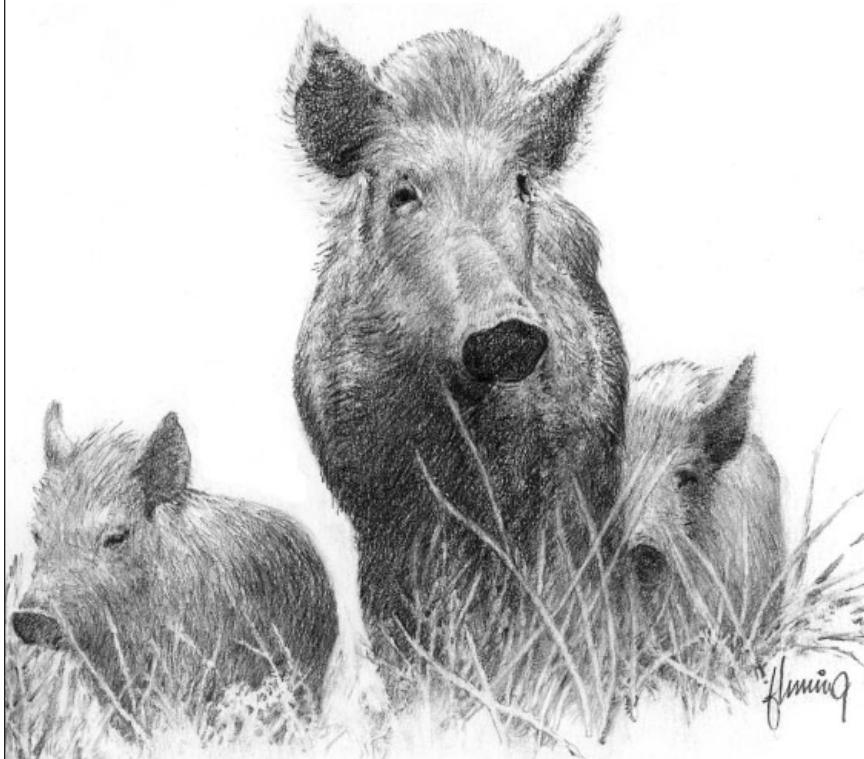
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TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE

# The Feral Hog in Texas

by: Rick Taylor  
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PHOTO BY DAN KLEPPER

Feral hogs (*Sus scrofa*) are an old world species belonging to the family Suidae, and in Texas include European wild hogs, feral hogs, and European-feral crossbreeds. Feral hogs are domestic hogs that either escaped or were released for hunting purposes. With each generation, the hog's domestic characteristics diminish and they develop the traits needed for survival in the wild.

# Introduction

**E**arly Spanish explorers probably were the first to introduce hogs in Texas over 300 years ago. As colonization increased, hog numbers subsequently increased. They provided an important source of cured meat and lard for settlers.

During the fight for Texas independence as people fled for safety into the United States or Mexico, many hogs escaped or were released. It was not until the mid 1800s when hostilities between the United States and Mexico ended that settlers once again began bringing livestock back into Texas. The livestock included hogs that ranged freely. Many escaped, contributing to the feral population.

In the 1930s, European wild hogs, “Russian boars,” were first imported and introduced into Texas by ranchers and sportsmen for sport hunting. Most of these eventually escaped from game ranches and began free ranging and breeding with feral hogs. Because of this cross-breeding, there are very few, if any, true European hogs remaining in Texas.

Feral hogs are unprotected, exotic, non-game animals. Therefore, they may be taken by any means or methods at any time of year. There are no seasons or bag limits, however a hunting license and landowner permission are required to hunt them.

# Description

Feral hogs may appear basically the same as domestic hogs and will vary in color and coat pattern. A mature feral hog may reach a shoulder height of 36 inches and weigh from 100 to over 400 pounds. The extreme larger hogs are generally not far removed from domestication. Males are generally larger than females. European wild hogs are about

the same size; however, their legs and snouts are usually longer and they have a larger head in proportion to the body. Their body is covered with long, stiff, grizzled colored hairs, long side whiskers, a longer straighter tail, and a nape on the neck giving the European hog a razor-back, sloped appearance. The crossing of European and feral hogs often produces an offspring with some European characteristics. Feral hogs are more muscular than domestic hogs, and have very little fat.

Additionally, the hairs of European appearing hogs and their hybrids frequently have multiple split ends. The young are born a reddish color with black longitudinal stripes. As they mature, the coat color becomes predominantly dark brown or black.

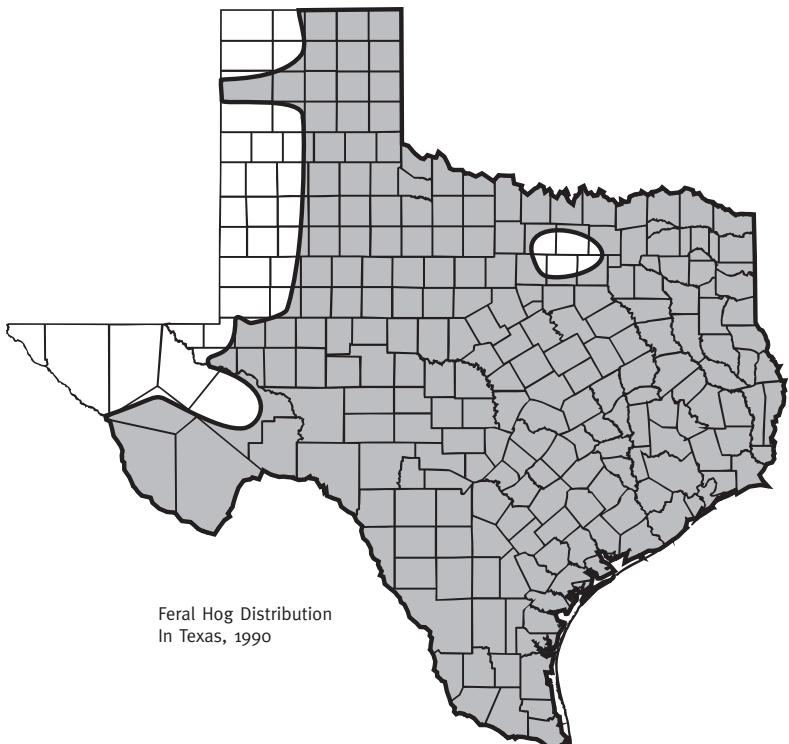
Hogs have four continuously growing tusks (two on top, two on bottom) and their contact causes a continuous sharpening of the lower tusks. They have relatively poor eyesight but have keen senses of hearing and smell.



# Distribution

Feral hogs are distributed throughout much of Texas, generally inhabiting the white-tailed deer range, with the highest population densities occurring in East, South and Central Texas. North and West Texas have very low or no populations. However, reports indicate that populations are beginning to expand and increase in these areas. There is currently an estimated population in excess of 1.5 million feral hogs in Texas.

The increase in population and distribution is due in part to intentional releases, improved habitat, increased wildlife management, and improved animal husbandry such as disease eradication, limited natural predators, and high reproductive potential. There seem to be very few inhibiting factors to curtail this population growth and distribution although extreme arid conditions may impede it.



# Reproduction

Feral hogs are capable of breeding at six months of age but eight to ten months is normal, provided there is good nutrition. Under poor habitat conditions, sows have been known to eat their young. Gestation is around 115 days with an average litter size of four to six, but under good conditions may have ten to twelve young. While capable of producing two litters per year, research has shown the majority of sows have only one per year. Young may be born throughout the year with peak production in the early spring. The young are born with a 1:1 male to female sex ratio. Feral hogs generally travel in family groups called sounders, comprised normally of two sows and their young. Mature boars are usually solitary, only joining a herd to breed.



PHOTO BY DAN KLEPPER

## **What do feral hogs eat?**

Feral hogs are omnivorous, meaning they eat both plant and animal matter. They are very opportunistic feeders and much of their diet is based on seasonal availability. Foods include grasses, forbs, roots and tubers, browse, mast (acorns), fruits, bulbs and mushrooms. Animal matter includes invertebrates (insects, snails, earthworms, etc.), reptiles, amphibians, and carrion (dead animals), as well as live mammals and birds if given the opportunity. Feral hogs are especially fond of acorns and domestic agricultural crops such as corn, milo, rice, wheat, soybeans, peanuts, potatoes, watermelons and cantaloupe.

Feral hogs feed primarily at night and during twilight hours, but will also feed during daylight in cold or wet weather.

## **Where do feral hogs live?**

Feral hogs are found in a variety of habitats from moist pine forests in East Texas to the brush country of South Texas. They prefer bottom-lands such as rivers, creeks, and drainages when available. Hogs are generally found in dense vegetation cover often associated with water, but also do well in drought prone environments.

During hot weather, feral hogs enjoy wallowing in wet, muddy areas and are never far from dense protective cover. They will concentrate in areas of food availability, especially where there are nut producing trees or agricultural crops.

Their home range is based mainly on food availability and cover. It is usually less than 5,000 acres, but can range up to 70,000 acres. In general, boars have a larger home range and will also travel greater distances.

## **Will they harm livestock or wildlife?**

Feral hogs compete directly with livestock as well as game and nongame wildlife species for food. However, the main damage caused to live-

stock and wildlife is indirect destruction of habitat and agriculture commodities. Rooting and trampling activity for food can damage agricultural crops, fields, and livestock feeding and watering facilities. Often wildlife feeders are damaged or destroyed. They also destabilize wetland areas, springs, creeks and tanks by excessive rooting and wallowing. In addition to habitat destruction and alteration, hogs can destroy forestry plantings and damage trees. While not active predators, wild hogs may prey on fawns, young lambs, and kid goats. If the opportunity arises, they may also destroy and consume eggs of ground nesting birds, such as turkeys and quail.

## How long do hogs live?

The average life expectancy, under good conditions, in a wild hog population is about four to five years; however, they may live up to eight years.

## What about feral hog mortality?

Mortality in feral hog populations is greatest in the young less than three months of age, mainly due to accident, starvation and predation. Adult mortality is largely due to hunting, parasites, disease and tooth deterioration. Predation by mountain lions, coyotes and bobcats is only a minor limiting factor.

## Do feral hogs carry disease?

In general, diseases from wild hogs do not pose a significant threat to humans; however, some diseases can be transmitted to livestock and wildlife. It is important to keep all livestock vaccinated, especially where large feral hog populations are concentrated.

Various diseases of wild hogs include pseudorabies, swine brucellosis, tuberculosis, bubonic plague, tularemia, hog cholera, foot and mouth disease, and anthrax. Internal parasites include kidney worms, stomach

worms, round worms and whipworms. Liver flukes and trichinosis are also found in hogs. External parasites include dog ticks, fleas and hog lice.

## **What is pseudorabies and swine brucellosis?**

**Pseudorabies**, also known as “mad itch” is a swine herpes virus that may affect the respiratory, nervous and reproductive systems. Despite its name, it is not a rabies type disease but derives its name from the symptoms similar to a rabid animal. It is transmitted primarily through breeding but may also be transmitted through respiratory secretions of the infected animal. Infected adult swine typically develop flu-like symptoms whereas young pigs can have severe respiratory and digestive symptoms and ultimately die. Pseudorabies poses no threat to humans but may be fatal to domestic livestock and pets.

**Swine Brucellosis** is an infectious, bacterial, reproductive disease that can cause abortion, low conception rates and other problems. It is transmittable to humans, known as undulant fever, and causes flu-like symptoms such as fever, chills, aches and pains. It is treatable with specific antibiotics.

## **How do I keep from contracting diseases?**

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department recommends all hunters use disposable plastic or rubber gloves when field dressing or cleaning wild swine. Bury or burn the gloves and entrails and then wash your hands with soap and hot water. And finally, make sure the meat is thoroughly cooked.

## **Is the meat good to eat?**

Yes, meat from feral hogs is extremely tasty and much leaner than pen-raised pork. The meat from older boars may be tougher and rank tasting if not prepared adequately. As with all pork, care should be taken and the meat well cooked. Otherwise, it should be prepared just like market hogs. The slower the meat is cooked, the more tender and tasty it becomes.

## What is the difference between a hog and javelina?

Although somewhat similar in appearance and habits, feral hogs and javelinas are not related. While feral hogs are indeed true pigs, javelinas belong to a totally separate family of mammals. Javelinas are smaller, have an unnoticeable tail, only one dew claw on the hind foot, a scent gland near the base of the tail, a grizzled-grayish coat with a white band of hair around the shoulder or “collar,” and are more social or herd-like animals.

Although feral hogs and javelinas inhabit the same range in South and Central Texas, they are not compatible.

## What is a hog shield that I hear about?

Feral hogs are equipped with a tough shoulder hide, which is made of a tough scar tissue. This is formed through continuous fighting and it hardens as the animal ages and survives more fights.

## What are feral hog signs?

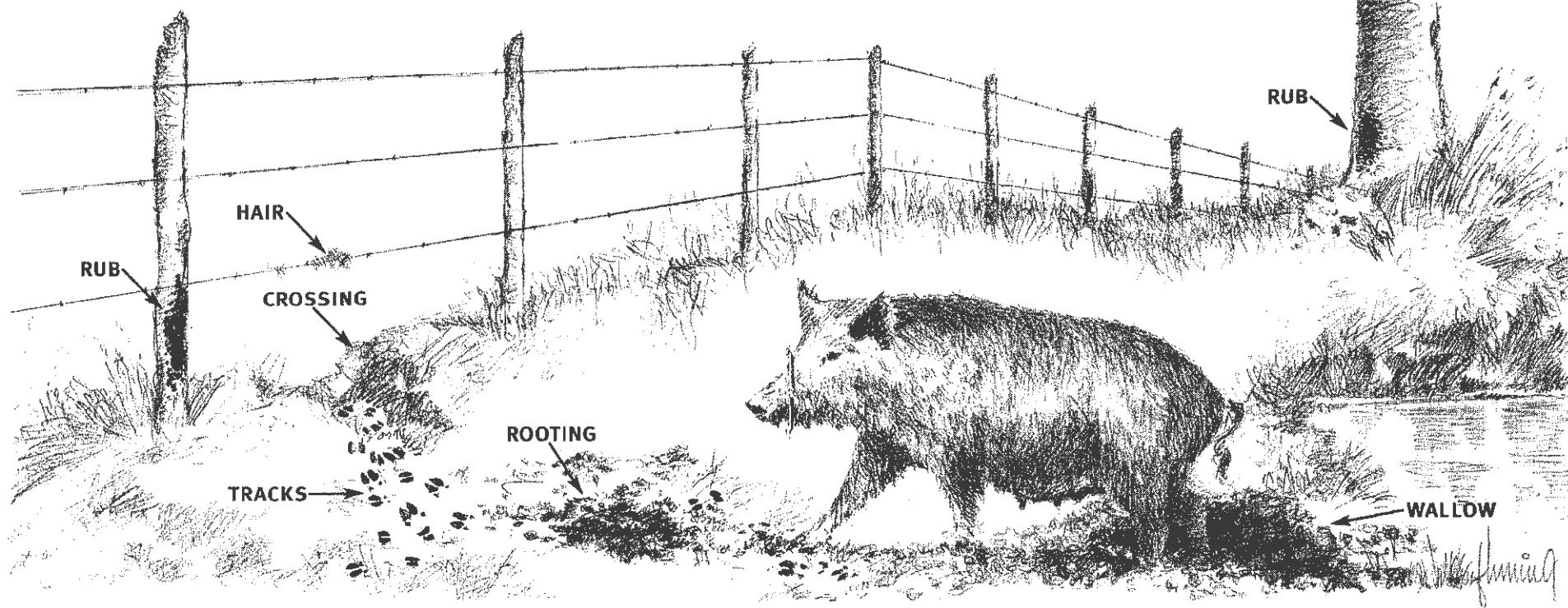
Because feral hogs are largely nocturnal, the visible signs they leave behind are often all there is to indicate their presence. These signs include wallowing, rooting, rubs, crossings, trails and scat (droppings). Wallows are found in muddy areas and are made where hogs root and roll in the mud. They do this to cool off and also the mud protects their skin from the sun and insects. Rubs are then made when hogs scratch



Track comparisons between javelinas, white-tailed deer and feral hogs.

or rub themselves on tree trunks, telephone poles, fence posts, and rocks leaving a noticeable sign with mud and hair often left clinging. The height of the rub often indicates the size of the hog.

Rooting is easily recognized because it looks as if the soil has been plowed. Most often rooting takes place over a large area. Some rooting holes can be as much as three feet deep, which possibly could cause vehicle damage. A hog track is similar to a deer track except the toes are more rounded and wider in comparison to length. Hog hair is easily distinguished from other mammals and may be found at fence crossings and rubs. Scat appears very much like that of a small calf, being dropped in several small piles, which is very distinct from deer pellets or predator cord-like droppings.



## Are feral hogs dangerous?

All wild animals have the potential of being dangerous, especially when wounded or cornered. In a natural state, feral hogs will prefer to run and escape danger, and are not considered dangerous. Extreme caution should be maintained when tracking wounded animals, trapping animals or encountering females with young. Their razor sharp tusks combined with their lightning speed can cause serious injury.

## How do I hunt feral hogs?

Although feral hogs are not classified as game animals, a hunting license is required to hunt them. Feral hogs are very intelligent and considered to be challenging quarry. Many hunters consider the long tusks and mean appearance a genuine trophy, in addition to the quality of meat. They also provide a great off-season challenge and opportunities to hone hunting skills and spend time in the field.

There are many hunting techniques used, including stand hunting over a baited area, quite often incidental to white-tailed deer hunting. Stalking or still hunting over baited areas and areas indicating recent hog activity, such as wallows, are commonly used techniques. Corn or milo, often soaked in water and allowed to sour and then buried underground is good bait.

Night hunting with a spotlight is often used; however, the local game warden must be notified beforehand. (There are certain laws which prohibit using artificial light where deer are known to range.) Hunting with well-trained dogs is another hunting method utilized and can be very exciting. Because the feral hog has such a tough hide the best rifle calibers to use should be a .243 or greater to prevent wounding and loss of the animal. Bowhunting, muzzleloading, and handguns are also popular among sportsmen to hunt feral hogs.

## Additional control methods?

Trapping is a common method utilized by sportsmen and landowners. Live trapping enables the individual to harvest the animal, fatten it up, or sell it. It also allows numerous individuals to be caught at once without an active participant. Several types and designs of live traps can be utilized. The most common design is a 4'x8' heavy duty cage with a spring door, root door (see diagram, p. 19), or drop door.

Snares can also be used effectively when placed under fences in travelways that surround active areas; however nontarget animals may also be captured. In some areas of Texas, aerial gunning from a helicopter is an efficient technique. There are currently no birth control, toxins or repellents registered for the control of feral hogs.

## Can I wipe out a hog population through hunting or trapping?

The feral hog has managed to survive, adapt, and increase their numbers despite attempts at population control. While it is possible to keep the population in check with continuous control, it is highly unlikely to eradicate a hog population within an established range.



# Common myths concerning feral hogs range from numbers to damages caused

Until recently, if anyone tried to tell you how many feral hogs there are in Texas, they were just blowing smoke. "When it comes to feral hogs in Texas, separating fact from fiction is becoming a little easier as research reveals more about the pesky porcines," said Dr. Billy Higginbotham, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension wildlife specialist. "There remains much we don't know about this exotic that has inhabited our state for the past 450 years."

Highest ranking among the myths are estimates of the actual number of feral hogs in Texas, Higginbotham said. A common number that has been bantered about for years is 1 to 4 million. But there was just no data to support this estimate.

That is, there wasn't until Dr. Roel Lopez, associate director of the Texas A&M University Institute for Renewable Natural Resources, used geographic information system procedures to turn

the guesstimates into reliable estimates, said Higginbotham, who collaborated with Lopez on the study.

The term geographic information systems, usually simply called GIS, refers to a procedure that involves diverse data gathering means, from on the ground GPS referenced data to satellite to historical records, and organizes it geographically. "A simpler way to put it, is that it's just an electronic map," Lopez said.

Using GIS techniques, Lopez was able to quantify the extent of the feral hog habitat in Texas. He estimates that "approximately 134 million acres, or 79 percent of the state's 170 million acres, represents feral hog habitat," said Higginbotham.

By knowing the range of feral hog habitat and the species population density in various types of Texas environments, Lopez also came up with a population

estimate that has some meat to it, Higginbotham said. Lopez estimates that the actual number could range from a low of 1.9 million to a high of 3.4 million.

Exaggerated claims of feral hog population growth rates are a related myth. Many of the population guesstimates are based on a purely arbitrary number of hogs in Texas being set at 1 million in the 1970s. This number, which also had no research basis, is then often extrapolated on using another bit of misinformation: that because of feral hogs' high birth rates, their population

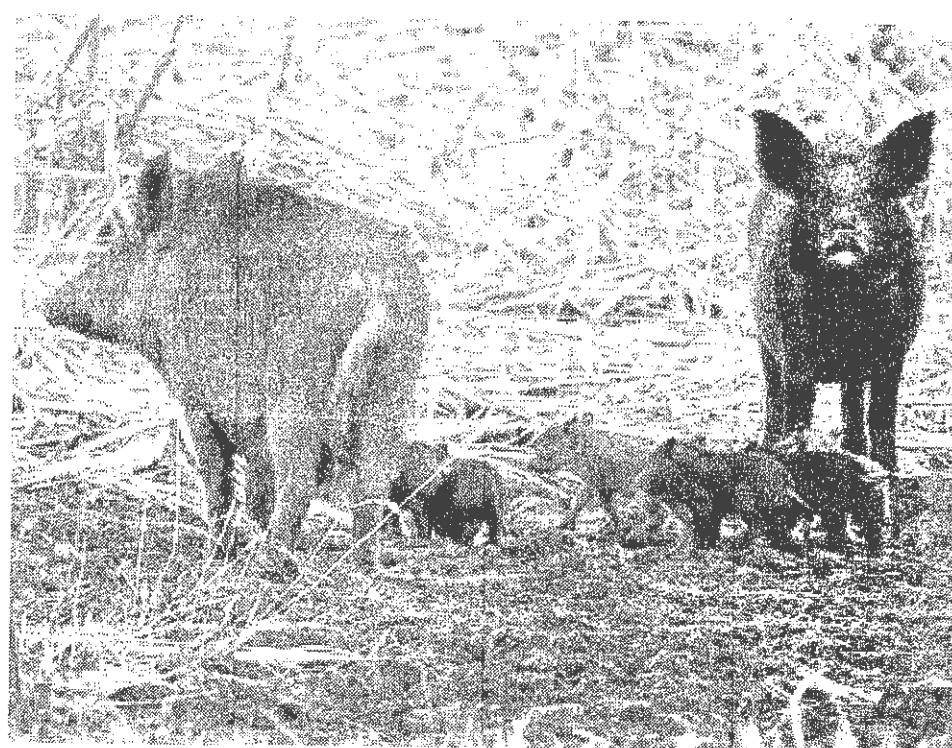
is doubling every year.

## So what are the facts?

A consolidation of past studies was conducted by Lopez's graduate students.

"The average litter size in Texas and the Southeast is 5.6 pigs," Lopez said. It is also known, that on average, a sow is about 13 months old when she has her first litter and that, also on average, mature sows have 1.5 litters per year. This means there is a significant population growth rate, but a far cry from the doubling yearly myth, Lopez said. "We

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# MYTHS

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estimated the population growth of feral hogs in Texas averages between 18 percent to 20 percent annually," Lopez said. "This means that it would take almost five years for a population to double in size if left unchecked."

The study used three methods to estimate feral pig population growth in Texas: the statewide number of aerial permits issued for shooting feral hogs; the number of pigs processed in commercial processing facilities; and feral hog control data made available from U.S. Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services.

## Feral Hog in Pasture

A common myth is that it's possible to identify the breed of a given feral hog by its color and markings. "Hogwash," said a Texas AgriLife Extension Service wildlife specialist. Another common myth is that recreational hunting alone can control feral hog populations, Higginbotham said. "Of the dozen studies conducted across the nation, hunting removes between 8 percent and 50 percent of a population, with an average of 24

## Farm & Ranch Times

percent across all studies," he said. "In order to hold a population stable with no growth, 60 to 70 percent of a feral hog population would have to be removed annually."

**Another myth is that it's possible to identify the breed of a given feral hog by its color markings.**

"Today's feral hogs are descended from domestic breeds, Eurasian wild boars and, of course, hybrids of the two," Higginbotham said. "But despite claims to the contrary, simply observing the color patterns, hair characteristics and size cannot let you definitively identify which of the three types and individual hog falls into."

One thing about feral hogs is definitely not a myth — the huge amount of damage they do to crops, wildlife habitat and landscapes, Higginbotham said. And from all indications, the damage they do is expanding in scope and range. "Feral hogs were once largely a rural or agricultural issue in Texas, inflicting over \$52 million in damage annually," he said. "But the porkers have literally moved to town and are now causing significant damage in urban and suburban communities. This damage includes the rooting of landscapes, parks, lawns, golf

courses, sports fields and even cemeteries, as they search for food. It has been estimated that a single hog can cause over \$200 damage annually."

The \$200 per hog estimate doesn't include the damage feral hogs do as they compete with other wildlife species, such as whitetail deer, for food and habitat, he noted. And some of the species challenged by feral hog invasions are endangered species.

"For those landowners actively engaged in deer management, their tolerance of feral hogs should be very, very low," Higginbotham said. "Can

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we reduce the damage feral hogs do through control efforts? The answer is 'absolutely yes.'

"Landowners remain the first line of defense since Texas is 95 percent privately owned land," Higginbotham said. "This means arming the public with best management practices and using various legal control methods to abate the damage by reducing feral hog populations."

For more information on feral hogs, visit the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension website, "Coping with Feral Hogs," at <http://feralhogs.tamu.edu>