

Frequently Asked Questions-Wild Pigs (2016)
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- 1- How many they average per litter and how often they can breed in a year?

The average is probably about 5 to 6 pigs per litter. Sows probably average one litter 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.

- 3- How large can they become?

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 between 75 and 250 pounds. A 300 pound wild pig 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?

Tthey 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.

- 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. Appealing to this 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% of their diet is believed to be composed of vegetation (including crops where available). 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 feral hog-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 feral hog. Where the rare feral hog attack occurs, it is usually during a hunting scenario where dogs are used to bay or corner a hog in a spot and the hogs “run 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, feral hogs usually flee rather than fight. Nevethless, worldwide, an average of 7 fatal wild pig attacks have occurred per year over the last decade, with 13 alone in 2015.**

- 8- If impaled by a pig 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.

- 9- How high can they jump?
Wild pigs can and have “climbed” the sides of hog traps 5 feet tall. They are not going to clear the fence in one bound as a deer might. However, hog traps with 90 degree corners must be covered on top because the hogs will 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.

- 10-How do they sleep? (habits...i.e. burrow a den? Standing up?)
Wild pigs can simply lie down and sleep, usually on their sides. They typically 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 lay in mud and/or seek deep shade.

11-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 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 heart/lung region. Preferred rifle calibers for pigs are 25 to 30 caliber. Regardless of the caliber/weapon, shot placement is essential for a clean and ethical kill.

12-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.

13-What is the average cost of property damage they inflict in Texas? Total cost of annual property damage?

A 2004 survey conducted by Texas 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 wild pigs and/or correct the damage. This is indeed a very conservative estimate. Other researchers suggest that damage per pig per year averages \$200. So, multiply that figure by a population estimate to get a total damage estimate. The problem is, we do not have a good estimate of the total wild pig population in Texas, other states or the United States as a whole—although the Texas population has been roughly estimated at 2.6 million animals with a nationwide population numbering between 8 and 9 million head.. 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—again, a figure we don’t have a good handle on.

14-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 study conducted near Overton, Texas estimated the home range of mature sows at about 1200 acres or 2 square miles. Mature boars will be even more mobile in their movements.

15-What do 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 feral hogs. Research suggests that the wild 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.

16-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.

17-When does a sow abandon its litter and when do they separate?

They really don't "abandon" their litter. A "sounder" is a family group of pigs made up of sows (typically related via about 3 generations) and their piglets. Pigs are weaned by about 3 months of age but young may start consuming solid food at about a week 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.

18-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.

19-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 with USDA-APHIS at Texas A&M-Kingsville 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 "hog 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. More recently, dehydrated fish have shown to be good bait for wild pigs.

20-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 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) Indiscriminant 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 pigs 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. However, non-target species (e.g., wild pigs, raccoons) get their fair share of this supplement. As a result, the sows that are on this higher nutritional plane because of their access to the unintended supplement allows sows to 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 37 states have established wild pig populations.

21-Where do they originate from?

Pigs were domesticated some 8,000 to 10,000 years ago. There are believed to be numerous areas of origin in both Europe and Asia. The first pigs were brought into what is now Florida in 1539. They were brought into Texas around 1542.

22-What’s the difference between a wild pig, feral hog and a boar, and are their different species?

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 or closely related species and therefore will interbreed with no problems resulting in all sorts of “hybrids” between the 2 groups. Hence, the term “wild pig” is most inclusive of these three types and their “crosses”. 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.

23-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. There are approximately 100 buying stations licensed in Texas to buy wild pigs from landowners that have trapped them. The wild pigs are then transported to a processing facility and after a pre-mortem inspection by a federal inspector, the pigs are slaughtered and enter the human food chain here in the U.S. but also are exported to Europe and Asia.

24-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...

25-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. Baby pigs have been found among the stomach contents of larger wild pigs but it is unknown as to whether the small pigs were killed then eaten or scavenged after death. However, as an omnivore, wild pigs can be predacious on small reptiles, amphibians, young livestock (e.g., kid goats and lambs) and other mammals including white-tailed deer fawns.

26-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.

27- 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 pigs competing over a food source or as a danger warning to other hogs).

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

NO-Wild pigs do not cause swine flu.

28- What is the estimated population of wild pigs in the United States?

We do not have estimates based on scientific data, we have guesstimates. Most would agree that it is somewhere between 8 million and 9 million animals but this estimate is not always based on reliable data. There is a real need to conduct surveys to establish baseline population data. In Texas at least, we estimate 2.6 million head based on several population studies..

29- What is the estimated world population of feral hogs?

Some countries in Europe and Asia feel they have a better handle on their total populations of wild pigs and some of these census techniques are just now being employed in the U.S. There are probably 11 to 13 million wild pigs found worldwilde.

30- What is the estimated dollar amount of destruction caused by wild pigs yearly in the entire U.S.?

Some reports place the total damage figure as high as \$1.5 billion in the U.S. annually. That was based on a damage estimate of approximately \$200 damage per pig per year and the pig population of 6 million animals. However, if the population estimates (guesstimates) are wrong-- so is the total damage estimate.

31- 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 but researchers are working on finding better methods to estimate our Texas populations as well as in other

states so we can gain a better handle on the total U.S. population. Currently, a population estimate of 2.6 million in Texas, the most of any state, and a nationwide population of between 8 and 9 million head.

32-When were wild pigs introduced to our soil?

1539-- In what is now Florida by Hernando de Soto. These pigs were domestics used as a food source by the explorers but obviously there were some escapes during exploration and these pigs became the seed stock for wild pig/feral hog populations.

34. 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. In addition, aerial shooting opportunities for the public are offered by several helicopter services and a number of hunters offer their services to remove wild pigs using specially trained dogs.

35. Where are the worst problems with wild pigs 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. Vehicle-pig collisions are increasing and they have resulted in considerable vehicle damage, human injuries and even fatalities.

36. How many wild pigs are caught each year?

We do not have figures on the total number of wild pigs trapped and/or killed per year. We do know that from 2004- 2009, 461,000 hogs were federally inspected at TX processing plants. However, this is only a percentage of the wild pigs kept for home use or taken by hunters. Annual hunter harvest averages about 20% or more of the populations--but these data are also lacking.

37. What diseases do they carry and are they harmful to other animals?

A number of 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 pigs 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 wild pigs for home consumption, use proper precautions (latex gloves and eyewear) and wash saws and knives used in field-dressing, skinning and butchering in hot soapy water.. Obviously, the biggest threat is disease transmission to domestic swine herds.

What are the different species of wild pigs typically found in Texas?

There is but one species (Sus scrofa) but many breeds are involved as most of our wild pigs are originally from domestic stock. However, stockings of the Eurasian wild boar have also been made in several states including Tennessee, North Carolina, California, Texas and New Hampshire. As a result, these states may have extremely diverse genetic stocks of wild pigs.

38. 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.

39. 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 feral hogs.

40. Does the nation/Washington DC 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 34 states they now inhabit. In 2014, the president's budget included an allocation of \$20 million to conduct research on and control the damage caused by wild pigs—this is a significant step in the right direction as it shines

a national spotlight on the damage environmentally, economically, ecologically and threat to human health this invasive exotic species poses.

41. What are the wild pig's habitat preferences?

Typically, wild pigs 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 wild pig 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.