



Controlling Feral Hog Damage

Feral hogs (*Sus scrofa*) are members of the same family as the domestic breeds, and in Texas include the European wild hogs, feral hogs, and hybrids. Feral hogs prefer the cover of dense brush for protection, but may also be found in open range and grassy areas. During hot weather they spend much of their time wallowing in ponds, springs and streams close to protective cover.

Feral hogs are omnivorous and will eat anything from grain to carrion. Vegetable matter constitutes an important part of their diet. When available, acorns are preferred. They also consume roots and invertebrates such as centipedes, leeches, earthworms and crayfish. In certain areas cultivated crops and row crops make up a significant portion of their diet. Wild hogs also prey on young native and exotic wildlife, livestock, and other small vertebrates.

Identification

Feral Hogs

Feral hogs are domestic hogs which have escaped into the wild or have been released for hunting purposes and have become free-ranging (Fig. 1). Their size and color depend upon their breed and their nutrition during development.

European Wild Hogs

European wild hogs (often referred to as "Russian" boars) differ in appearance from feral hogs. The wild hog usually has longer legs, a larger head, and a longer snout. The young are reddish brown with black longitudinal stripes. As the animals mature the stripes disappear and their color changes to black. Wild hogs have continuously growing tusks, in addition to multiple splits at the ends of the hair shafts, and mane from the neck to the base of the tail.

Hybrids

In the 1930s, European wild hogs were released as game animals in areas of the Texas hill country that already had feral hog populations. Crossbreeding between the two species occurred. As a result of the hybridization, few individuals of the pure European strain are found in Texas. However, the hybrid offspring retained many characteristics of the European wild hogs.

Distribution

Hogs were first introduced into the Americas in 1498 by Christopher Columbus during his exploration of the West Indies. After hogs were introduced into Florida in 1593, free-ranging populations spread into Georgia and the Carolinas and eventually became established in all southeastern states. Feral hogs have been present in Texas since 1689. Today, feral hogs and hybrid feral hogs are reported in almost every county of Texas (Fig. 2).

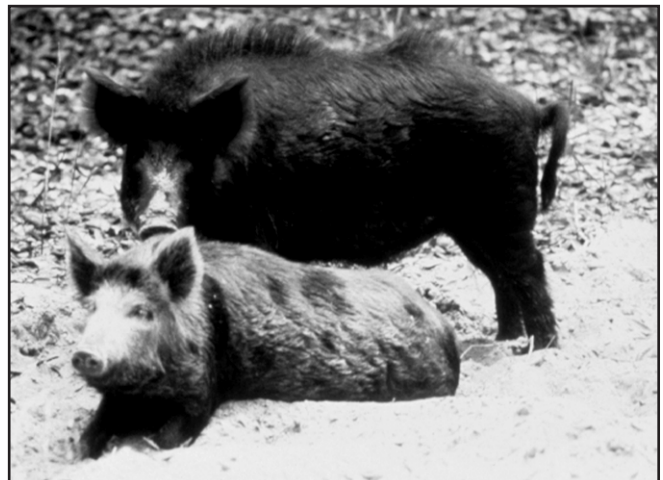


Figure 1.

Biology, Reproduction and Behavior

Adult weight: 100 to 400+ pounds.

Adult height: 3 feet (males are generally larger than females).

Color: Varies from solid black, brown, blond, white, or red to spotted or belted.

Feet: Similar to deer tracks, except toes have more round or blunt tips.

Gestation period: 115 days.

Litter size: Four to eight, but may be as large as thirteen.

Number of litters: Two litters per year, and young may be born at any time of the year.

Social structure: Generally travel in family groups comprised normally of two sows and the young. Boars are generally solitary, only joining a herd to breed.

Damage

Damage caused by feral hogs has been reported in many Texas counties. Crops commonly damaged by feral hogs include rice, sorghum, wheat, corn, soybeans, peanuts, potatoes, watermelon and cantaloupe. One of the most common types of damage to these crops occurs when the hogs root in the fields. Hogs not only consume, but also trample the crops.

Hog predation on livestock is a serious problem in some counties. Feral hogs kill and consume lambs and kid goats, especially during lambing and kidding seasons. Physical evidence of hog predation may be hard to detect because the entire animal may be consumed. Ewes and nannies with swollen udders but no nursing lambs or kids may be an indication of hog predation. Hog tracks and droppings may aid in identifying the predator. If hog predation occurs when kids and lambs are larger, the entire carcass may be turned inside out, leaving the hide with little or no flesh except on the head, neck and hooves.

Feral hogs also will kill ground-nesting birds such as quail and turkey and destroy their nesting sites. On some management areas, feeders used to assist native wildlife are damaged or destroyed by feral hogs attempting to consume the feed.

Control Methods

Feral hogs can be effectively controlled by snaring, live trapping, shooting and hunting them with dogs. There are currently no toxicants or repellents registered for the control of feral hogs.

Snares

Snares are used in travel ways under fences that surround crop fields or livestock pastures. Three

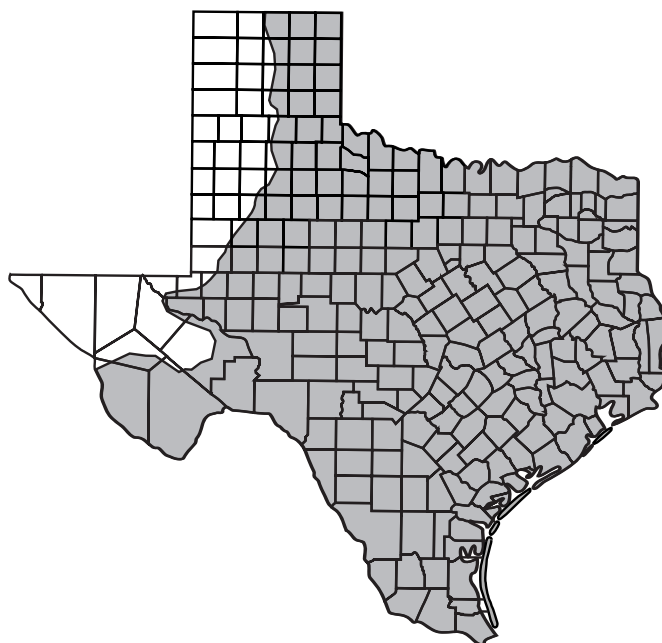


Figure 2. Feral hog distribution in Texas.

sizes of galvanized aluminum aircraft cable are recommended for snares: $\frac{5}{64}$ inch; $\frac{3}{32}$ inch; and $\frac{1}{8}$ inch. An extension cable, 3 feet long or longer, should be tied from the snare to a log drag or fence post to effectively restrain the animal.

Live Traps

Live traps are extremely effective for capturing feral hogs. There are many different trap designs, ranging from single-catch traps with a drop gate or one-way swing gate to multi-catch traps. One kind of multi-catch trap is shown in Figure 3. This trap is constructed from 2 inch x 2 inch angle iron and stock paneling. The trap door measures 2 feet x 2 feet and when closed should lie at an angle of approximately 30 degrees. The assembled trap measures 10 feet x 10 feet x 5 feet. It may be necessary to enclose the top of the trap to prevent hogs from escaping. All sides of the trap, except that with the gate, may be camouflaged with brush. If the trap is not secured to trees, it should be secured to the ground with 24-inch stakes so that the hogs do not escape by rooting under the sides.

After the trap is assembled and secured, the door should be propped open with a stick that is attached to a screen door spring. The door should be opened approximately 18 to 20 inches, and the spring should have enough tension to pull the stick away from the door when a hog enters the trap.

Grain and domestic livestock carcasses are the preferred trap baits. Since a hog has a keen sense of smell, place the trap so the wind will carry the smell of the bait toward the areas where hogs are most active. This will attract hogs to the trap. Prebaiting may be necessary in areas where crops have been damaged.

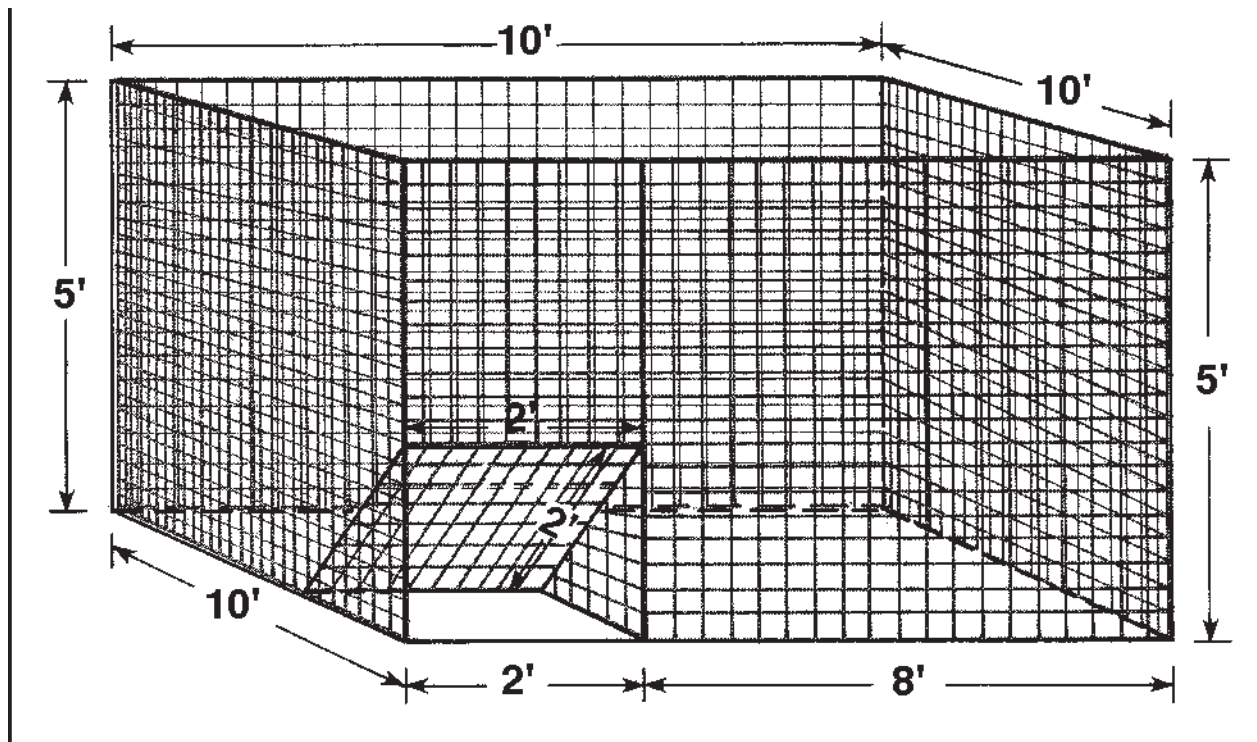


Figure 3. Multi-catch live trap for feral hogs.

Once an animal has been caught in the trap, other hogs can enter by pushing open the door. As with other multi-catch traps, a decoy animal in the trap will aid in attracting other hogs to enter. The trap should be checked daily for animals. Decoy animals should be fed and watered as often as necessary.

Shooting

Shooting at night is an effective control method, especially if the areas of greatest hog activity are known. A spotlight with a red filter is a valuable aid to the hunter. Before using a spotlight, notify Texas Parks and Wildlife officials.

Hunting with Dogs

In certain situations, trained dogs may be used to locate individual hogs or small groups of hogs. Dogs should be properly trained for hog control to

lessen the possibility of their being injured. Hogs will become particularly wary of dogs after they have been continuously harassed. Therefore, other control methods may become necessary.

Restrictions

In Texas, feral hogs are considered free-ranging, exotic animals and may be taken at any time of the year by any legal means. Consult with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department regarding any question about the legal status of feral hogs.

For more information and assistance, contact your local Texas Wildlife Damage Management Service office.

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