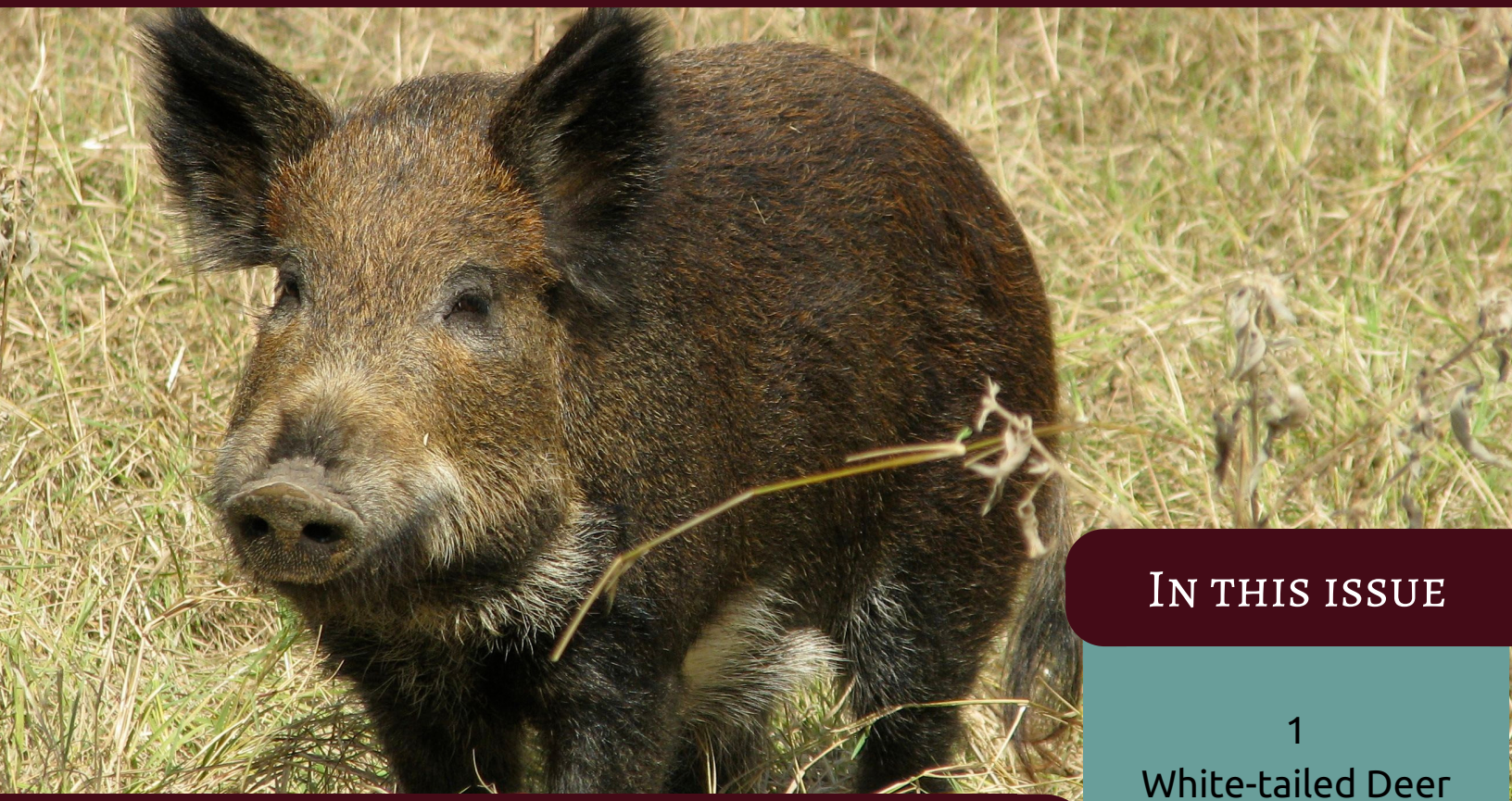
Texas A&M AgriLife Extension

Wild Pig Newsletter

Wildlife and Fisheries Extension Unit ~ Vol.1:3 ~ Fall 2016 ~ www.feralhogs.tamu.edu



In this issue

White-tailed Deer Management: Considerations for Wild Pig Control

By: Krista Ruppert, Wildlife & Fisheries and Fisheries Sciences Undergraduate
Texas A&M University, College Station, TX

With more than 500,000 deer harvested annually throughout the state, the hunting of white-tailed deer is important in Texas. This native Texas species is central to the culture and livelihood of many wildlife managers, hunters, and producers. Wild pigs, on the other hand, are an exotic invasive species that damage natural ecosystems across the state, with the added potential to negatively impact white-tailed deer populations. Wild pigs in conflict with deer are known to exclude deer from natural resources, consume feed from supplemental feed sites, and even predate upon deer themselves. The opening of deer season brings with it a number of considerations when it comes to wild pig management, as efforts must be made to reduce the impacts of these animals on native wildlife, including white-tailed deer.

(Continued on page 2)

Diet Similarity and Competition

One of the reasons wild pigs are successful is their diet plasticity, or their ability to consume many different food sources to reach their nutrient requirements. Because of this, if their preferred food is not available, they are still able to survive, and even thrive. Both deer and pigs prefer to eat primarily herbaceous materials, including browse and mast. Wild pigs, however, are opportunistic omnivores, and if vegetation is not available, they will select from other available resources to survive (Adkins et al. 2006). Deer do not have this adaptation, and if herbaceous material is not available, they cannot utilize an alternative food source. Wild pigs have been documented excluding deer from natural and supplemental feed sites, consuming food that would otherwise have been consumed by deer (Campbell et al. 2013). In a productive year this may not be problematic, but in times when resources are scarce wild pigs may exhaust the resources required by deer before moving on to other food sources, leaving deer with few options. Wild pigs have also been documented as having a similar or greater rate of intake than deer, as well as a more efficient ability to extract nutrients from food during digestion, allowing them to be productive by growing and reproducing even when resource availability is not ideal (Elston et al. 2010a,b). Given the overlap between deer and pig diets, the displacement of native deer from resources, and the ability of pigs to survive on varied food types, it is easy to see how wild pigs can potentially outcompete deer and other native wildlife for resources.

Wild pigs are able to exclude deer from supplemental resources and natural foraging areas, leaving deer with fewer food options.

Excluding Wild Pigs from Supplemental Feed Sites

With more than 300 million pounds of corn being distributed each year in Texas, unprotected supplemental feed sites could be providing a stable food source for many wild pigs. This could lead to a result contradictory to which feeders are intended. While the intent is to attract deer and other native wildlife, supplemental feed sites can instead attract pigs which in turn displace the deer. Not only is this negative to deer and native wildlife, the cost of feed that does not even reach its intended purpose is an unnecessary expense for wildlife managers. If feeders are being used, the use of exclusionary devices or species-specific feeders may help reduce competition between wild pigs and deer (Schlichting et al. 2015).

Exclusionary fences such as this can keep wild pigs away from supplemental feed sites while still allowing deer access.

For example, feeder pens at heights greater than 28 inches may be effective at preventing wild pigs from consuming feed without excluding fawns, adult deer, or other native wildlife including turkeys. A combination of utility panels and T-posts around each feeder at a diameter of at least 30 feet can allow multiple deer to enter and exit the feeding area, thus excluding wild pigs without limiting deer access (Timmons et al. 2011). For more on excluding wild pigs from supplemental feed sites, see the AgriLife Extension publication “Using Fences to Exclude Feral Hogs from Wildlife Feeding Stations” and the video “Exclusion Fencing for Feral Hogs around Wildlife Feeders” on the AgriLife Extension YouTube Channel.

Direct Predation and Wild Pig Abatement

Though wild pigs primarily eat herbaceous plants (including grasses, roots, tubers, and mast) they also opportunistically consume animal matter. Up to 6% of a pigs diet could be animal matter, which may include native wildlife species such as reptiles, amphibians, the eggs of ground nesting birds such as quail and turkey, and even the fawns of white-tailed deer (Taylor et al. 1997). Deer are not a primary food item for pigs, but nonetheless may be consumed opportunistically. While it is yet unknown whether wild pigs scavenge for dead deer or directly prey upon deer themselves, the idea of wild pigs consuming deer at all may be concerning for hunters and wildlife managers. Unfortunately, there is not any specific method for protecting deer from predation by wild pigs except through the enactment of wild pig abatement strategies. Both lethal and non-lethal control techniques can be employed year-round to reduce the impacts of wild pigs on agricultural production, water quality, habitat, and native species, including white-tailed deer.

Wild Pig Abatement Techniques		
Method	Suggested Timing	Resources
Lethal Methods		
Trapping	Begin mid-to-late summer or mid-to-late winter, in times of low resource availability	Placing and Baiting Feral Hog Traps How to Corral Trap Wild Pigs Corral Traps for Feral Hogs How to Box Trap Wild Pigs Box Traps for Feral Hogs
Aerial Gunning	Following trapping efforts when canopy cover is reduced and visibility is high	Aerial Hunting of Feral Hogs
Snaring	Use in conjunction with exclusionary fencing and time to deter intrusion attempts	Snaring Feral Hogs Making a Feral Hog Snare How to Snare Wild Pigs
Strategic Shooting	Can be enacted opportunistically or deliberately to target solitary mature boars; also effective in directing wild pig movements and abating agricultural and other damage	Shooting Techniques for Wild Pigs
Trained Dogs	Final measure after all other methods have resulted in a reduction of the population	
Non-Lethal Methods		
Exclusionary Fencing	Use in conjunction with lethal control methods if possible	Using Fences to Exclude Feral Hogs from Wildlife Feeding Stations
Contraception	Currently impractical and not recommended	
Vaccination	Currently impractical and not recommended	

This table summarizes a timeline of wild pig management as described in the blog article "A Strategic Approach to Wild Pig Management." To access the wild pig resources referenced above please CLICK HERE.

Conclusion

Wild pigs and white-tailed deer have the potential for conflict both in natural and supplemental feeding areas, making this an important consideration when managing for deer. Strategies such as exclusionary fencing around supplemental feed sites are especially important around hunting season, but wild pig control methods should be employed year-round in order to effectively reduce populations or at the very least prevent further population growth. Trapping, aerial gunning, strategic shooting, snaring, and the use of trained dogs are the legal lethal control methods in Texas to consider when implementing wild pig abatement efforts. Visit feralhogs.tamu.edu and the AgriLife Extension YouTube Channel for more information on wild pigs and feral swine control in Texas.

One Shot, One Pig – Considerations for the Ethical Harvest of Wild Pigs

By: Josh Helcel, Extension Associate, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service

It's been said that anything worth doing is worth doing right. Reducing the damages associated with exotic invasive feral swine is certainly no exception. Whether you are trapping, snaring, using trained dogs or simply hunting, at some point the use of firearm may become necessary. There are a number of misconceptions out there about harvesting wild pigs. The fact is these animals are well adapted as a tough and enduring species. However, contrary to popular belief they are not bulletproof. This article will address a number of the myths concerning proper shot placement, adequate firearm selection and the on-site vs off-site harvest of wild pigs while trapping.

Proper Shot Placement in the Field

Common firearms used to harvest wild pigs include rifles, shotguns, muzzleloaders and archery equipment. Regardless of the firearm selected proper shot placement is critical. However, it is important to understand that proper shot placement on a wild pig can be considerably different than on a white-tailed deer. The anatomy of adult male wild pigs, or boars, often makes a behind the shoulder shot less than ideal when using small caliber firearms or archery equipment. One reason for this is the presence of the "shield" on a mature boar. This structure, present in adult boars, is a thick subcutaneous tissue layer that can become as thick as 2 inches in mature adults (Figure 1). The adapted purpose of the shield is to protect boars as they fight and compete among each other for breeding rights.

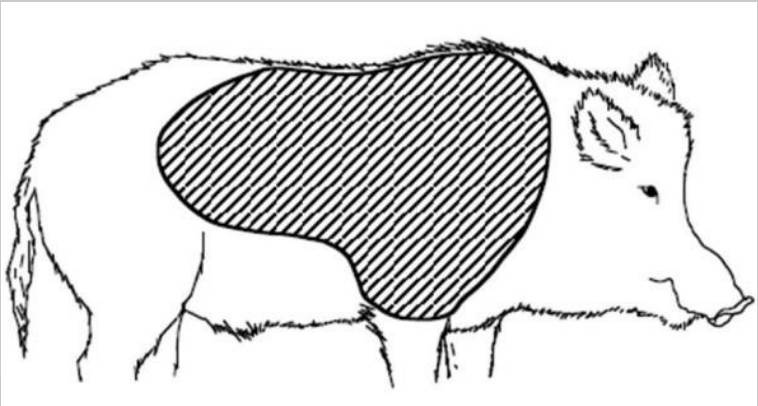


Figure 1. The "shield" of a mature male wild pig, or boar, is an important consideration in proper shot placement and firearm selection in the field (Drawing by Jack Mayer).

Wild pig lore suggests that the shield structure can potentially stop a bullet. In reality, there is no available research to confirm or refute this claim. My personal experience is that the shield will most likely not stop a bullet. I have observed, however, that the thick shield and hide of a mature boar can at times seal smaller entrance/exit holes, thus making recovery considerably more difficult due to the resulting lack of a blood trail. The same can occur with large females, or sows, due to the thick hide and fat found in the same relative location as a boars shield. While the vitals of a wild pig are slightly lower and more forward than those of a white-tailed deer, shoulder and behind the shoulder shots are generally still lethal. However, shot placement directly behind the ear of a broadside animal is often a better choice in making both an ethical harvest and quick recovery (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Shot placement directly behind the ear (red circle) of a broadside wild pig is a good choice for ethical harvest and quick recovery in the field.

Archery Equipment and Wild Pigs

Archery equipment including compound, traditional and crossbows can also be effective tools in ethically harvesting wild pigs. However, factors including arrow weight, draw weight, broad head type, shot distance, shot placement and others can dramatically influence success. Modern crossbows are generally powerful enough for even the largest of wild pigs. However, for compound and traditional archers a minimum of 50 lbs. draw weight coupled with a relatively heavy arrow employing a fixed blade broad head are generally recommended. Keep in mind these are general recommendations only. In Texas it is currently legal to use significantly lighter equipment as well as mechanical or expanding style broad heads.

Many archers choose only to harvest small to average sized wild pigs (up to 130 lbs. or so) with conventional archery tackle. This is often a good strategy, as a behind the ear shot is generally not recommended when using archery equipment including crossbows. In order to more effectively navigate to shield, many archers wait for a quartering away shot where the arrow may be placed behind the last rib and into the opposing shoulder.

Trapped Wild Pigs – On-site vs. Off-site Harvest

In Texas, trapped wild pigs may be legally harvested at their origin of capture or sold live to an approved holding facility. Even if they are not being transported and sold live, some trappers choose to harvest animals away from the trap site. Others choose to harvest them directly in the trap. A popular topic among trappers is whether harvesting wild pigs in the trap will negatively impact future trapping success. While research is lacking on this issue as well, there may be real merit to both sides of the argument. I have personally harvested wild pigs in a corral trap only to have another sounder enter the trap the very next night. I have also harvested wild pigs in a box trap and then observed subsequent animals to avoid that site until the trap was moved to a different location.

Factors including the amount of trapping pressure, amount of human disturbance, resource availability and a number of others may all influence future trapping success once wild pigs are trapped and/or harvested in the trap. However, if you plan to harvest animals in the trap there are a few things that can be done to minimize any potential negative impacts.

1. Check traps first thing in the morning, and be prepared to remove or harvest animals immediately.

2. Verify each target and the background prior to any shot. Follow all necessary shooting safety precautions, and know and understand the laws regarding the use of firearms.

3. Harvest animals largest to smallest with one well-placed brain cavity shot (Figure 3). A 40 grain .22 LR round is generally sufficient on even large wild pigs using this type of shot.

4. When corral trapping, use a rake to spread/cover dirt as necessary following each harvest.

5. Consider moving box traps following harvesting wild pigs in the trap. Even a relatively short move can sometimes make a big difference.

Figure 3. To ensure a proper brain cavity shot, draw an imaginary line from each ear to the opposing eye of a wild pig. The shot can then be placed at the intersection of the two lines.

Conclusion

Anyone enacting wild pig abatement efforts has an obligation to do so ethically and humanely. Wild pigs threaten agricultural production, water quality, native species, habitat and the list goes on and on. With an estimated 2.6 million wild pigs in Texas, there are plenty of opportunities for "organic free range pork." But before these animals can be donated to the hungry or simply end up as the main course on the family dinner table, the use of some type of firearm is often necessary. Wild pigs are as tough as they are intelligent, but a little attention to detail can go a long way in the ethical harvest, quick recovery and continued success of other control strategies such as trapping.

To Subscribe to the Wild Pig Newsletter Please Email:
josh.helcel@tamu.edu

(Scan or click to view)

Check out our Management App

Find us on Facebook

Follow Us On twitter

Watch us on YouTube

Find us on: Pinterest

Read Our BLOG

Find Our EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

Take Our Online Courses

what's Trending

Articles:

available at http://wild-wonderings.blogspot.com/

Urban Feral Hogs: Why Did They Damage My Yard And Not My Neighbors?

Learn about urban feral hogs and how their biology plays a big role in their behavior (click to view)

The Best Choice for a Corral Trap Gate

presents a comparison of typical corral trap gates and suggests which style is most effective. (click to view)

A Strategic Approach to Wild Pig Management

learn how to time and sequence your control efforts according to research based models (click to view)

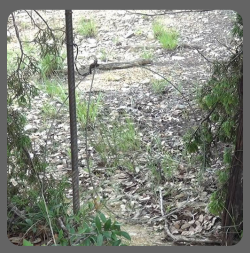
Videos:

available at https://www.youtube.com/user/WFSCAgriLife/playlists

NEW

Part I - Urban Wild Pigs: Impacts and Concerns

learn how urban wild pigs impact urban areas and challenge landowners (click to view)



Snaring Wild Pigs: Ground Anchored Trail Set

learn new ways to set snares for wild pigs (click to view)

Can Wild Pigs Jump?

learn about jumping abilities of wild pigs and panel height recommendation for trapping efforts. (click to view)

This publication was developed by the Enhancing Feral Hog Management Project, with funding support from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency through a Clean Water Act §319(h) Nonpoint Source grant administered by the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board. Additional funding was contributed by the San Antonio River Authority.

SAN ANTONIO RIVER AUTHORITY
Leaders in Watershed Solutions