

The Feral Hog in Texas

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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.

Early 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 crossbreeding, 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 razorback, 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.

What do feral hogs eat?

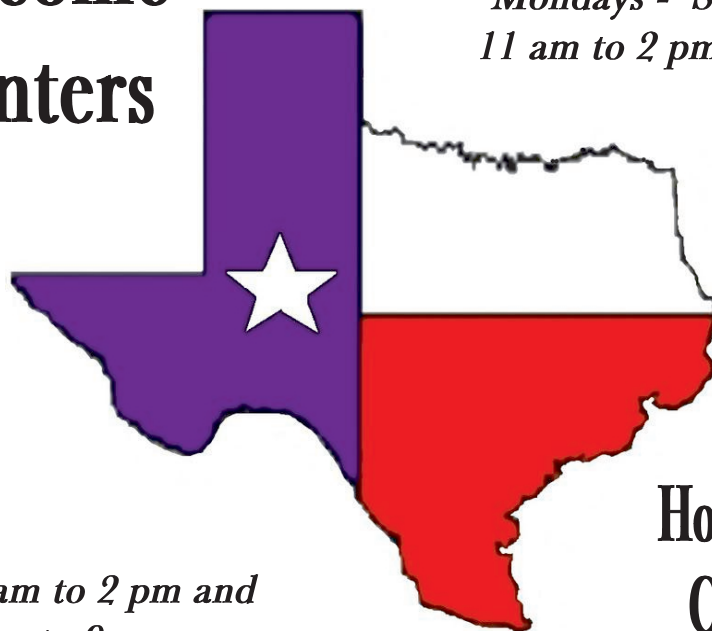
Feral hogs are omnivorous, meaning they eat both plant and animal matter. They are very opportunistic feeders and much of their diet is based on seasonal availability. Foods include grasses, forbs, roots and tubers, browse, mast (acorns), fruits, bulbs and mushrooms. Animal matter includes invertebrates (insects, snails, earthworms, etc.), reptiles, amphibians, and carrion (dead animals), as well as live mammals and birds if given

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