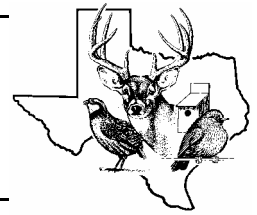




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July 2007

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Feral Hogs: Whose Problem Are They?

By Greg Pleasant, TPWD Wildlife Biologist

Texas potentially has one of the largest feral hog populations in the world. Estimates range from 1 to 3 million. No one knows for sure, because there just is not an accurate way to count them and they move around so much. Feral hogs have been in Texas for over 200 years, but have recently dramatically increased. Feral hogs now occur in 24 states in the U. S. and have spread from 462 counties in 1988 to 1,042 counties by 2004, an increase of 125% in 16 years.

Feral hogs cause damage in many forms including loss of livestock and wildlife feed, fences, crops, and rooting that causes loss of hay production and damage to farm equipment. People often ask when is the state going to do something about feral hogs? The news is the state is not going to fix this problem for you. There is not going to be a bounty on feral hogs. There is not going to be a legal poison or chemical sterilization in the near future. If you want something done about feral hogs you, the landowner, are going to have to do it yourself. We need to start working together and working smarter.

Trapping is probably the single most effective method of removing hogs that we

have for this area. There is no hope of eliminating them completely. Unfortunately, they are here to stay, but their numbers can be greatly reduced along with the damage they do. Trapping correctly is the key to success. Because most hogs travel in large family groups the objective should be to catch all the pigs in the group at one time. Using small traps makes catching the whole herd much less likely and risks educating the pigs that did not get captured. There are places where box traps have there place. They will certainly catch pigs of all sizes. They are often less expensive and are easy to hall and relocate, but are not the best tool for the job if reducing hog numbers on a large scale is the objective. If you only have a few hogs they are probably fine.

Trap Location:

You can get pigs to come to your trap but it is usually quicker to move the trap to the pigs. Find where the pigs are traveling, either from bedding areas or your neighbors property, and put the trap near there. I do not recommend putting the trap in the middle of your hay pasture just because that's where the damage was done last night. Pre-baiting your trap for as long

(Continued on page 2)

Hog Trap Cost Estimate

Below is a cost estimate for a large teardrop corral trap in May 2007 based on cost of materials from the Lee County General Store:

Item	Quantity	Price	Total
5'x20' utility panels (4"x4" mesh) *	10	\$46.50	\$465.00
6½' t-posts (5 per panel, plus 5 to string the trip wire)	55	\$3.75	\$206.25
Trap gate purchased from the LCWA	1	\$75.00	\$75.00
TOTAL			\$746.25

* Important Note: 5-foot utility panels are a must. Do not even bother with a 4-foot panel.

(Continued from page 1)

as it takes to get the entire herd comfortable entering the trap before you set it is the key to successfully trapping the whole herd. In so doing, you are likely to encourage the pigs to spend more time in the vicinity of the trap before you catch them. The middle of your hay pasture is not where you want them. If you are planning on selling the pigs you catch, you need to be able to get a trailer to the trap in all weather. So consider that when setting up the trap.

The more pigs you have in your area the larger your trap should be. In a larger trap more hogs will feel comfortable entering. Also, a group of pigs are less likely to panic and go crashing through the corral walls if they have room to move away from you. Your trigger needs to be far enough away from the gate and set in a way that all the pigs have time to enter the trap before the first pig to the bait can trigger the gate to close.

Justification for the expense:

Pigs can die very quickly in the heat without shade or water, so once you set a trap you must check it every morning. Using a large corral trap and pre-baiting you can greatly reduce the amount of time you spend checking on traps compared to the number of hogs captured. If you are selling the trapped hogs, you will also have more hogs per trip. This saves time and gas. This trap may cost you more money up front, but you should make up the difference quickly in time and miles driven. At May 2007 hog prices it will only take you a few large hogs to re-coop the trap expense. Example five, 251lb. hogs would yield you \$702.50 at .50 cents per pound and a \$15 head bonus.

Baiting:

Corn is as good as anything for baiting hogs. There are dozens of recipes for soured corn with sugar, yeast, and

raspberry or strawberry jello. Over time it probably wouldn't hurt to change up your bait to entice stubborn hogs to enter a trap, but it is probably not necessary. You can place a feeder inside your trap to further reduce the number of trips you have to make to the trap to pre-bait. A five gallon bucket feeder would work fine or even cheaper.

Placing corn in a piece of 4" diameter perforated PVC sewer pipe with a cap on each end will slow down raccoons and crows from eating your bait. Burying corn in post holes is another way to keep bait in the trap longer and keeps soured corn from drying out.

Large corral traps are more effective at catching herds of pigs than small box type traps and can save you time and money in the long run.

Feral hogs are a growing problem, but if enough landowners in an area trap smart their numbers can be greatly reduced. The directors thought that this was a worthy cause to try to get people to work together to and encourage more people to get involved. The association is having trap gates built and selling them at a greatly reduced price to coop members. More information will be available on the Lee County WMA website leecountywildlife.org. If you would like to purchase a trap gate for \$75.00 please contact Greg Pleasant.

Key Points:

- 1 Bigger is better, a large corral trap is the best!
- 2 Pre-bait until all the pigs are entering the trap before you set it. Use a trail camera to monitor the trap use.
- 3 If you use a trip wire type trigger, it should be set at least 24 inches off the ground and in a small area at the far end of the trap away from the gate. You don't want the small hogs to trip the gate closed before the big ones have entered.
- 4 If you are not going to trailer the hogs you catch make the corral round. Pigs will stack up in corners and try to escape. Consider using a feeder in the trap to save trips while pre-baiting.

Species Highlight: Great Plains Rat Snake

By Greg Pleasant, TPWD Wildlife Biologist

Shortly after we had the program on snakes back in April, I came across a snake near my driveway that I had not seen before. My son, Hunter, who held every snake that Clint the snake man brought, said he wanted one for a pet. This one was not aggressive, so I caught it to try to figure out what kind it was. It turned out to be Great Plains Rat Snake. They only grow to about 42" and eat rodents, birds, frogs and lizards. They could be mistaken for Texas Rat Snake (chicken snake) but do not get as large. We bought a few mice so Hunter could watch the snake catch and eat them, something I think no kid should be deprived of. It's even better than the discovery channel.

Best I can figure, we have about 27 different species of snakes in this part of Texas and only 4 of them are poisonous. Instead of assuming that all snakes are poisonous, take the time to learn what the few poisonous snakes look like. Snakes serve a valuable purpose in the ecosystem. Try to be a little more tolerant of all wild critters, not just the cute cuddly ones. More information and photos of this snake, and of the four local poisonous species, can be seen at leecountywildlife.org

Notes From Your President

Hello, Lee County Wildlife Association Members!

Since retiring as the Lee County Extension Agent in December 2006, I have been busy with numerous things related to sales and consulting. It is a pleasure to represent and serve you as your LCWA president. My commitment to wildlife programming and enhancement is still a priority issue.

We need your input on future program topics and items the LCWA directors and members should be addressing. Please share these with your co-op directors, or you may e-mail me at bgillum@ag.tamu.edu. I would like to encourage all five LCWA co-ops to have their fall meetings to strengthen our organization's mission and purpose. See you at your co-op meeting.

Game Cameras Available

Last year the LCWA purchased several motion game/trail cameras. These are available for members to borrow. The directors will keep track of and loan out the cameras for Association members to use. The users will simply have to provide their own batteries.

Using these cameras is fun to see what's on your property when you're not there, and also a great tool to survey your wildlife. Lee County wildlife biologist Greg Pleasant says that many times he has had people tell him that they only have doe on their property and no bucks... but the truth is, if you don't have one of these cameras out taking pictures night and day, you never really know what you have. You may be very surprised!

Contact your directors if you are interested in checking out one of the cameras.

Collecting Herd Composition Data

Please help with this effort, even if you only record a few deer. With nearly 500 members it all adds up. Herd composition data may be the most valuable data collected on a deer herd. When properly collected, herd composition data can reflect the overall health of a herd and help guide the manager in making proper harvest recommendations.

Herd composition data should be collected during August. The fawns have become a part of the herd by this time, yet they are small enough to be easily distinguished from adult deer. Observations outside this period may result in inaccurate data. Observations may be collected any time during the day. However, the first and last hours of daylight are often the most productive for deer seen per hour of effort. Observations should not be collected at night because it is too difficult to correctly identify sex and size.

All deer recorded must be viewed through binoculars or a spotting scope. Small antlers are easily overlooked without optical aids. Fawns whose spots have started to fade are also hard to distinguish when they are observed alone. Be sure to look at the hips of deer that you think could possibly be fawns because the hips are the last place to lose spots.

When observing deer in herds, it is important that each deer be identified. If a herd of six deer is seen but only four are positively identified, do not record any of the deer. If

there are two bucks, three does, and one fawn in a herd, you may easily identify the bucks but may not be sure of the other four unless they are all individually identified. When a herd is seen, quickly get a total head count, then go back and positively identify bucks first because they are easiest, then identify fawns, and finally identify the does making sure not to miss small-antlered bucks.

Herd composition data should be collected during August, during the day and using binoculars.

Observations can be made during routine ranch operations or as a special effort. Observing the same deer recorded on a previous count is not a concern. If a conscientious effort is made to record accurate data, a small amount of duplicate recording should not affect the ratio. All deer should be recorded as a buck, doe or

fawn. Recording bucks according to number of antler points is also beneficial. The occurrence of spikes versus multi-point animals is a good indication of the nutrition available.


Please return the completed form, included in this newsletter, by September 12th to Greg Pleasant, TPWD biologist.

***NO ONE WILL KNOW WHAT'S ON YOUR PROPERTY
Only total numbers of deer by region are made public***

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Dianna Noack
Senior Vice-President - Branch Manager



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