



# Feral Swine

## North Carolina Wildlife Profiles



USDA-APHIS

### Feral Swine (*Sus scrofa*)

Feral swine have been labeled as, “the greatest vertebrate modifiers of natural plant and animal communities.” Simply put, feral swine are a non-native invader in North Carolina capable of severe impacts on the state’s native wildlife and plants.

### Description

While terminology as it relates to “pigs” can be confusing, no matter what you call them — feral swine, wild boar, Eurasian wild boar, and all hybrids between them — are all the same species, *Sus scrofa*. All domestic pig breeds are descendant from the Eurasian wild boar, and when allowed to roam wild, can quickly revert to the habits and physical characteristics of their wild ancestors.

Feral swine coloration and coat pattern can vary greatly and may include combinations of white, black, brown, and red. Piglets are often striped or spotted, but lose this coloration as they mature. The body is covered sparsely with stiff bristle hairs and a fine undercoat. Although usually longer and leaner, feral swine closely resemble domestic hogs in appearance.

### History and Status

Feral swine are not native to North America or North Carolina. “Old world” swine were brought to North Carolina by early explorers in the 1500s as a reliable source of meat. In later years, free-range husbandry practices, along with intentional releases, reportedly gave North Carolina more pigs than any other colony in the new world. During periods of economic hardship, people relied on these “domestic” pigs as a food resource. This and other factors helped keep free-range pig populations in check throughout the first half of the 20th century. Additional releases, the popularization of “boar” hunting, and subsequent protection as a game animal later lead to expanding populations across the state. In 2011, the status of all free-ranging swine was changed, declaring them a nongame animal with no closed season or bag limits. Feral swine are now considered by most people in the state to be a nuisance to property owners and a dangerous liability to native wildlife communities.

### Habitats & Habits

Feral swine are highly adaptable animals that can live in urban, suburban and rural areas from the mountains to the sea. Feral swine are opportunistic feeders and are omnivorous, meaning that they will eat most anything.

Insects, worms and a wide range of vegetative matter are common in a feral pig’s diet. Larger animals are also fair game, like snakes, turtles and lizards, as well as the young of ground nesting birds like quail and turkey, and the occasional deer fawn. Sexual maturity comes at an early age for pigs. Most female pigs reach puberty at 6 to 10 months, and young males are developmentally ready for breeding at about the same time. Females can give birth to multiple litters annually with litter sizes depending on the breeding

*Feral swine are a non-native, invasive species capable of severe impacts on North Carolina’s native wildlife and plants.*



Feral swine often resemble domestic swine (Photo: Steve Hillbrand/USFWS)

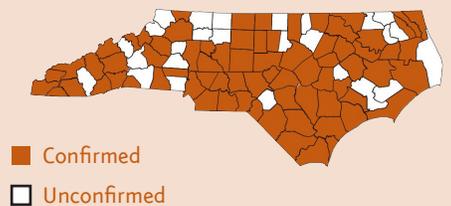


Damage caused by feral swine (Photo: USDA/APHIS)

### Range and Distribution

In North Carolina, heavy concentrations of wild pigs are scattered across the state and not contiguous. Feral swine have been documented in most counties of the state with densities being highest in the southern mountain region as well as in several coastal counties.

### Confirmed Feral Swine Reports in 2017-18\*



\*Data collected from Sept. 1, 2017 - Aug. 31, 2018

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## Wildlife Profiles - North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission

female's body size and condition, as well as overall habitat quality. Litter sizes in the wild vary greatly but generally range from three to eight piglets. Feral swine have few predators in North Carolina, and natural mortality rates are relatively low when compared to native species. This fact alone can cause a population of any given species to spiral out of control. Combine this with their high reproductive potential and an average lifespan of around 5 years, and it is easy to see how a relatively small isolated population of pigs can and will eventually expand into an enormous problem with real ecological and economic impacts.

### Human & NCWRC Interactions

Feral swine will avoid people when possible. Although confrontations are very infrequent, interactions between wild pig and people are reported annually. Occasionally, humans inadvertently walk between a sow and her litter and the sow reacts to protect her young. Hunting pigs with dogs that are used to bay or corner a pig can also create a potentially dangerous situation. Totally unprovoked attacks outside of these two scenarios are extremely rare and seldom occur. Given a choice, wild pigs usually flee rather than fight. Clapping your hands or making other loud noises will usually scare the pigs away.

Encounters with feral swine usually happen through the damage they leave behind. While foraging, feral swine root into and turn up the soil, causing extensive damage to landscaping, stream banks, lawns, and agricultural fields. A group of pigs, called a sounder, can root through and damage large areas overnight. Swine disturbance around stream and river edges can lead to erosion and water contamination. Feral swine also carry at least 30 diseases and nearly 40 parasites that can affect humans, pets, livestock, and other wildlife. Diseases like brucellosis, pseudorabies, and African swine fever are some of the concerns for wildlife managers when feral swine and people or livestock interact.

Due to the negative impacts of feral swine on agriculture, human health, and wildlife health, and their non-native status, the Commission supports removal and places few restrictions on their take from private lands. Trapping is the most practical and effective method of removing feral swine from an area. Additional information as well as feral swine regulations can be found at [ncwildlife.org/feralswine](http://ncwildlife.org/feralswine).

### References

- West, B. C., A. L. Cooper, and J. B. Armstrong. 2009. *Managing wild pigs: A technical guide*. Human-Wildlife Interactions Monograph 1:1-55.
- Mayer, J.J. and I.L. Brisbin, Jr. (1991). *Wild Pigs in the United States: Their History, Comparative Morphology, and Current Status*. The University of Georgia Press, Athens.
- John J. Mayer and I. Lehr Brisbin, Jr. Editors Savannah River National Laboratory Aiken, South Carolina, 2009. *Wild Pigs - Biology, Damage, Control Techniques and Management*

### Credits

Written by Jason Allen, Wildlife Management Division, NCWRC. 2019

### Wild Facts

#### Classification

Class: Mammalia

Order: Artiodactyla

#### Average Size

Length: 5-6 feet

Height: 30 to 40 inches at shoulders

Weight: males - 200-220 pounds; females - 150-170 pounds or less

#### Food

Roots, bulbs, fruits, mushrooms, worms, insects, larvae, mollusks, snakes, young birds, mice, moles, carrion.

#### Breeding/Young

Feral swine breed throughout the year and are capable of producing two litters a year. Litters can range from 2-12 piglets, but 3-8 is more common. Piglets are usually born with longitudinal stripes that disappear within six months. Weaned by 3-4 months old, the piglets may stay with their mother for up to three years, even as she produces other litters. Both males and females become sexually mature at 6-10 months, though most breeding in feral swine populations is done by the larger and older males. The gestation period averages 112-120 days but can vary from 100-140 days.

#### Life Expectancy

1 to 7 years in the wild; longer in captivity

## Report Feral Swine Sightings

If you have seen feral swine or signs of feral swine damage, please contact the NC Wildlife Helpline at:

866-318-2401 or

[wildlifehelpline@ncwildlife.org](mailto:wildlifehelpline@ncwildlife.org)