

# Feral Pig *Sus scrofa*

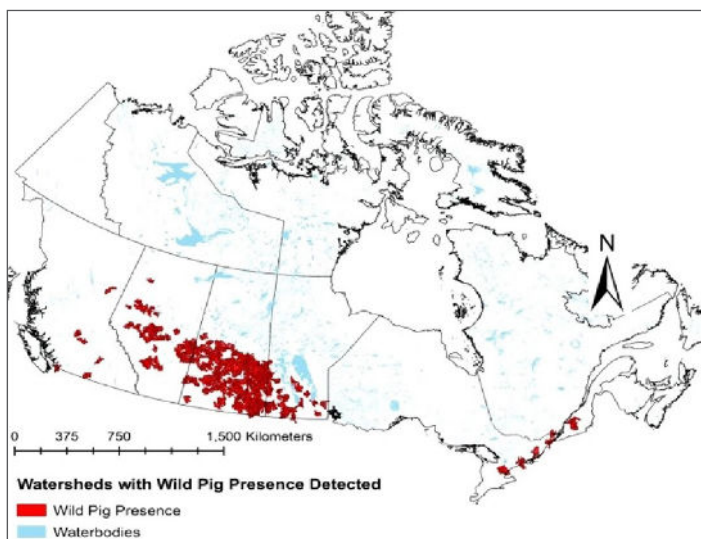
Domesticated pigs or swine or wild boar are a significant issue in many parts of the world. Specifically, the European wild boar is native to Europe, Asia and North Africa and were introduced all over the world for both farming and hunting. In Canada they cause habitat damage and create health risk many regions.

## Other Names

Wild boar, wild pig, feral swine, Eurasian wild boar, razorback, piney-woods rooster, poor man's grizzly.

## Legal Status

Invasive Species, designated "Schedule C" wildlife (Provincial) under the BC Wildlife Act Exotic (Provincial), BC Conservation status.



## Distribution

In BC, there are small populations with a sparse distribution within the province. Populations with low numbers are occasionally reported in the Lower Mainland, Vancouver Island, Thompson-Okanagan, Chilcotin, Peace, and Kootenay regions, often where farming occurs and the animals escape, temporarily. However, large established populations are not recorded at this time. A much higher density of feral pig populations are present in the Prairies (SK, MB) with moderate densities in Alberta.

## Identification

Physical characteristics vary considerably in regard to size, weight, color and/or length etc. Feral pigs are identified as any individual of the *Sus* genus (including domestic pig) that has escaped captivity or is no longer under a person's control. Adult males are larger than females and range from 153 to 240 cm in total length. Males weigh from 60 to 200 kg (132 to 440 lbs) as adults, while females range from 35 to 150 kg (77 - 330 lbs).

Adults stand about 1 m at the shoulders and taper back towards the hindquarters. They have a large wedge-shaped head with long ears and mobile snout. The coat may be long, coarse and dense, varying in color from black to reddish-brown to white, and may have a spotted or solid pattern, especially in the young. Adults may also have bristly hair along their spine.

The young are born with prominent stripes running down their backs that fade as the piglets reach four months old. Adults have prominent upper canine teeth that are visible even when the jaw is closed.

## Biology

**Habitat:** Feral pigs are very adaptable and can thrive in a wide range of habitats and elevations, including semi-arid rangeland to moist forests and wetlands, and from sea-level to altitudes of up to 2400m. Areas with dense cover and adequate water resources (riparian areas) are preferred.

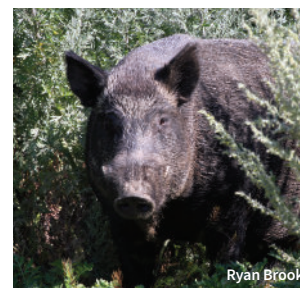
Some studies show that agricultural land with easy access to ample food sources bordered by sufficient cover has higher feral pig densities. Seasonal changes in habitat use has been reported to be linked to food availability.



Ryan Brook



Ryan Brook



Ryan Brook

**Reproduction:** Females reach reproductive age within the first year and males within seven months. Females typically bear two litters a year of 10-12 piglets whose survival rate is approximately 50%. The average life is nine years, physical growth of adults cease at around 5-6 years of age.

**Dispersal:** Range size depends on water, food and cover availability. They are social and form feeding groups and nursing groups called “mobs” or “sounders”. Dispersal can be instigated by hunting activities that break up small populations, accidental escapes from farms, or purposeful releases to a new region for big game hunting.

## Impacts

**Economical:** Costs incurred by agricultural producers from feral pigs include property damage from forage and wallowing behaviours, crop loss, enhanced security and fencing, as well as veterinary treatments and immunizations. Exact monetary amounts have not been reported in Canada at this time; however, it has been reported in the United States that feral pigs can cause up to \$300,000 USD in crop and infrastructure damage.

**Ecological:** Feral pigs can carry a number of diseases and are a significant risk to domestic swine production and may be to other wildlife. The list of potential diseases is long and includes some reportable diseases.

They can cause significant damage to habitats due to their forage and wallowing behaviour. Rooting and trampling by feral pigs is very destructive to native flora: it destroys seedlings, damages root systems reducing the plant’s ability to recover, diminishes seed banks of native flora and creates ideal conditions for invasive plants to colonize the disturbed soil. Foraging for invertebrates depletes the local ecosystem of vital decomposer populations. Sensitive areas such as riparian buffers are especially at risk and can lead to bank erosion and sedimentation of waterways. Water quality is adversely affected where feral pigs frequent, and they can transmit pathogens through water contaminated by feces.

Feral pigs compete with native wildlife for food and often predate on smaller animals such as reptiles, breeding bird eggs, small mammals and the young of deer, goat and sheep.

**Human:** Feral pigs have the potential to transmit parasites and disease to humans. Hepatitis E virus (HEV) can infect humans who have consumed water contaminated by *S. scrofa* feces, as well as having a potential for foodborne transmission by consuming raw or undercooked game meat. Communicability of HEV is unknown. Symptoms are acute viral hepatitis and have a 1% mortality rate in young adults (15 - 40) and a 20% mortality rate in pregnant women.



Billy Higginbotham, Bugwood.org



Craig Hicks, Bugwood.org

## Best Management Practices

**Prevention:** Farms with pigs should ensure fencing is adequate to prevent escapes and recapture any escapees as soon as possible.

**Purposeful release of feral pigs is illegal in BC and should be reported to the Ministry of Forest, Lands & Natural Resources; additionally, any case of livestock abandonment should be reported.**

**Control:** Studies in Saskatchewan, where feral pigs densities are the highest in Canada, have found some success with control measures such as coordinated harvest by trained teams, capture with large ground traps, aerial capture with net gun, and use of Judas Pigs (feral pigs with a GPS collar which are tracked to find more feral pigs), durable fencing and greater public engagement.

Currently, hunting is the only control measure in place in British Columbia. Feral pigs are regulated as a “Schedule C” species in the Designations and Exemptions Regulation under the Wildlife Act in BC and allows feral pigs to be hunted in the province with a valid hunting license.

**Education:** Public education and awareness will help with identifying new or previously unknown wild boar populations.

**Reporting:** Report feral pigs by:

- » Using the mobile Report-Invasives-BC app for iPhone, iPad, and Android platforms available for download at <https://www.gov.bc.ca/invasive-species>
- » Alternatively, the public can report Feral pig sightings online via the BC government website: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/plants-animals-ecosystems/invasive-species/reporting-invasive-species>
- » For more information about Feral pigs visit: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/plants-animals-ecosystems/invasive-species/mammals>

## References/Links:

- » Wickline, K. *Sus scrofa* wild boar. Animal Diversity Web. University of Michigan Museum of Zoology. [http://animaldiversity.org/accounts/Sus\\_scrofa/](http://animaldiversity.org/accounts/Sus_scrofa/).
- » Aschim, R. A., & Brook, R. K. (2019). Evaluating Cost-Effective Methods for Rapid and Repeatable National Scale Detection and Mapping of Invasive Species Spread. Scientific reports, 9(1), 7254.
- » Public Health agency of Canada. <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/lab-bio/res/psds-ftss/hepe-eng.php>
- » Feral Pig *Sus scrofa* L. Fact Sheet. Alberta Invasive Species Council. <https://abinvasives.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/FS-FeralPig.pdf>
- » Brook, R. K. and F. M. van Beest. 2014. Feral wild boar distribution & perceptions of risk on the central Canadian prairies. Wildlife Society Bulletin 38:486-494.