Help us keep wild pig populations low

Source: Matt Springer, UK assistant extension professor of wildlife management

Few things are scarier than encountering a wild pig in nature. Fortunately, this does not happen very often in Kentucky thanks to efforts of the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources and the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Wildlife Services. You can help the departments continue to keep populations low by monitoring your land and reporting signs or sightings of wild pigs.

Wild pigs are one of the most destructive invasive species in the United States, causing substantial crop damage, competing with native wildlife for resources, altering wildlife habitat and threatening biological diversity.

They have established populations in states to our south and have been there since European settlers brought them to the U.S. in the 1500s. Their current range, however, doesn’t extend as far north as Kentucky. Wild pigs usually get here when they are brought in from the south for hunting purposes or when livestock owners have escaped animals or lose track of free-range, domestic pigs. Pigs reproduce very quickly, sometimes having two litters in one year. It only takes two generations for a domestic pig to transform into a wild pig.

In nature, wild pigs will eat just about any and everything they can catch, which is one of the reasons they are so destructive. Their eating habits tend to displace native wildlife, including white-tailed deer and turkey. They also transmit at least 45 parasites and diseases to other wildlife, domestic livestock and sometimes humans.

Wild pigs have tracks similar to white-tailed deer, but they are rounder and wider with dewclaws angled outside of the hoof print. Wild pigs are also known to wallow and root. A tell-tale sign of wallowing is the trees near the occurrence will be coated with mud. Rooting damage is very similar to the effects of a garden tiller and can cover a large area.

If you see signs of wild pigs or have a sighting, call 800-858-1549 or report them on the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources website <https://fw.ky.gov/InvasiveSpecies/Pages/Wild-Pig-Home.aspx>. The department and the USDA Wildlife Services will work to monitor and trap the invasive species. This service is free, and trapping is the most efficient way to get rid of wild pigs, which can travel in large numbers called sounders.

More information on this invasive species is available in the University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service publication “FOR 160: Monitoring for and Controlling Wild Pig Populations in Kentucky.” The publication is available online at <http://www2.ca.uky.edu/agcomm/pubs/FOR/FOR160/FOR160.pdf> or by contacting the (COUNTY NAME) Extension office.

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