

Feral Pigs.

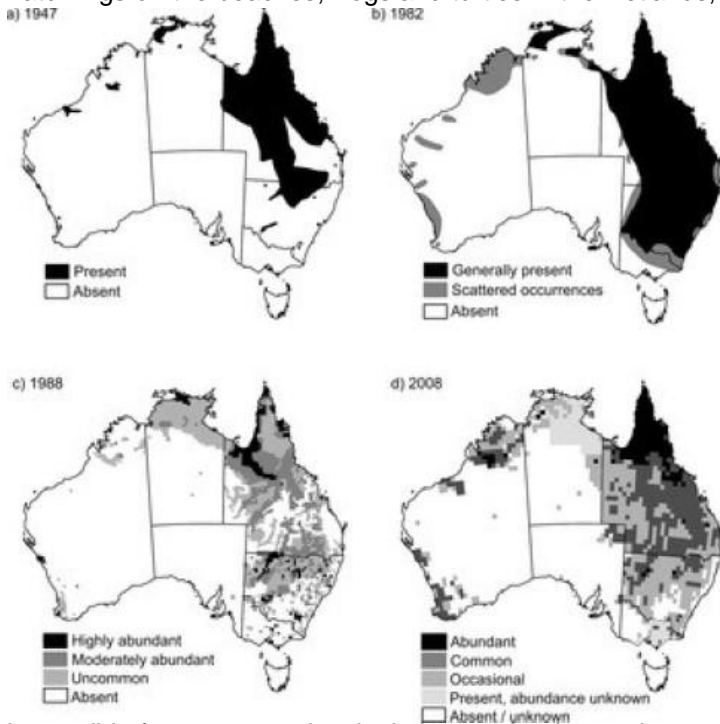
By Steve Hall

The feral pigs of Australia are descendants of escaped domestic pigs. In northern Australia there is evidence that some SE Asian pig ancestry may be present. Pigs were generally kept very loose in the early years of settlement and as settlements sprang up in the bush then sometimes died off (mining towns in particular) pigs and other animals were often abandoned to their fate. Pigs being very resilient often then established populations locally and over several generations reverted back to their wild ancestry and the pigs we see now. It is not uncommon to see a mob of pigs of every colour of the rainbow from black to red to white to spotted and every colour combination in between



Feral pigs are probably the biggest economic pest and potential disease treat to Australian agriculture. They are also very destructive on our environment. Being opportunistic omnivores, they will eat anything from grain and fruit crops to newborn lambs and calves, turtle eggs and hatchlings on the beaches, frogs and turtles in the wetlands, fish and reptiles. They will dig up large

areas of land in the search for roots, bulbs and corms. Pigs carry a range of diseases that can be transfer to humans. Hunters should take care when handling or dressing pigs that they don't end up with a disease that can make them extremely ill. Wear glove and practice good hygiene when dressing pigs to eat. If in doubt leave them where they lay.



There is estimated to be 23 million feral pigs in Australia. Despite all control measures their numbers continue to grow at roughly 0.7% (16,100) per annum. 70% of all feral pigs must be killed each year just to hold their numbers static. Sows will have 2 litters of generally 5 or 6 piglets (I have seen up to 8 in feral pigs). Young sows will reach sexual maturity at around 7 to 8 months and gestation is 4 months. Over a period of 2 years it

is possible for 2 sows and a single boar to be the producers of a further 72 pigs.

Feral Pigs now occupy most environments and habitats from coastal flood plains and rainforests to dry interior plains. There is now pigs in most areas of eastern Australia and southern Western Australia as well as significant populations in the Tropical north. Since the 1980's feral pigs have certainly got a toe hold in most districts and have expanded their range considerably. Areas that had no or very few pigs like the New England Tablelands now have pigs everywhere and in large numbers. The maps above show the gradual then exponential spread of feral pigs since 1947, 1982, 1988 and 2008



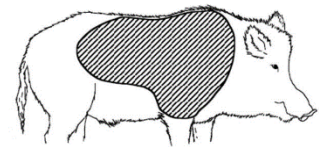
Despite popular belief, wild pigs do not need to live near water to survive and have been known to travel up to 50km in a 24hr period. I have found bedding areas high up on dry hills a kilometre or more from the nearest water source. Mobs are highly mobile and will move in and out of areas as conditions suit, particularly if they are harassed by shooters or doggers. Pigs will travel 12km from their bedding area to a food source and back home again during a 24hr period. They will stop and have a drink and a wallow somewhere along the way heading there and back.

When hunting pigs use the wind to your favour by traveling into it. Pigs have very poor eye sight so if you are careful you can put yourself into a position to cut them off from their bedding area by stalking along the edge of treed areas late in the afternoon or early morning. I have at times stalked up to pigs across open paddocks by using the wind to my favour. Move slowly and deliberately, quick movement will have them heading for the scrub at a rate of knots. Pigs have excellent hearing and smell. Don't slam your ute door when getting out, keep talk to a minimum, don't smoke or wear deodorants. If you know pigs are frequenting an area, park your vehicle well back (1km or more) from the spot and walk in quietly. Early mornings just on sunrise or late afternoons just before dark are prime times to hunt pigs, particularly if the day is going to be hot. During winter pigs are active longer during the day and can often be found out grazing on crops or travelling through at any time of the day. If hunting pressure is high pigs will become exclusively nocturnal and you will require a spotlight to find them. Large boars if undisturbed will become sedentary in an area and become very nocturnal in their movements.



Wild Pigs can be very dangerous and are very quick. Large boars are particularly dangerous if wounded or cornered. They have the capability of administering a nasty gash to your legs or body with their tusks should you get too close to an angry boar. Care should always be taken when approaching shot pigs.

A couple of things to remember with pigs. The heart is further forward in the chest when compared to other



animals like deer or goats. When aiming for a heart shot, point of aim should be forward of the front elbow (picture to left). Shots placed behind the front elbow will likely miss all vitals. Secondly large boars can have a thick shield or plate of gristle on their front shoulder (picture to Right). It is primarily there to protect them from injury when fighting, but it also serves as a Kevlar vest when you are trying to shoot them. I have seen a boar take a full magazine of 30-30 into the shoulder at 15 metres and not break stride. Debate over who was going to pursue him into the grass was very short when everyone refused to follow him up.

Every pig no matter large or small should be destroyed when hunting pigs. Leaving piglets or sows to "breed on" is unacceptable, uninformed and totally ignorant of the consequences of this type of action. So too transporting of live pigs for release in new areas "so I don't have to travel so far to hunt". Don't do it; Kill them all!

A 12-gauge shotgun loaded with buckshot, SG, SSG or solid slugs work well if hunting pigs at night or thick bush or in high cultivated crops or grass.

The Lever action rifles like .30-30, .45-70 and the .44 Magnum are effective on pigs at close ranges in scrub and bush.

223Rem, .243 Winchester, the .308 Winchester and other similar cartridges are good for killing feral pigs in a humane manner.

As a club, the GHAA has access to Feral Pigs on all our properties

