

TESTIMONY OF DR. PATRICK J. RUSZ, DIRECTOR OF WILDLIFE PROGRAMS,  
MICHIGAN WILDLIFE CONSERVANCY – MAY 6, 2009

The Michigan Wildlife Conservancy believes that wild hogs have the potential to cause more damage to Michigan's agriculture and natural resources than any single biological threat of the past several decades. We have provided this committee with articles that describe the destructive behavior of wild hogs. The scientific literature is replete with published studies of hog damage, and there have been many related stories in popular magazines and newspapers. You will hear from others today about the nature of the beast. So, I won't repeat the details; there is little serious disagreement about what wild hogs do.

The wild hog is to the land what the lamprey eel is to the Great Lakes—an invasive exotic species that is, at best, a management nightmare. But the lamprey eel caught resource managers by surprise by swimming into our state on its own, albeit through the man-made Welland Canal in the St. Lawrence Seaway. In contrast, the wild hog was hauled into our state in livestock trailers—right up I-75 and our other highways and bound for game ranches—even though the animal has a long and well-documented record of destruction in 40 other states. This outrageous movement of wild hogs into Michigan occurred because state agencies did not have the foresight to head off the problem. The legislature is now being asked to pass necessary laws to catch a horse now at least partly out of the barn, as the wild hog population in Michigan is at a tipping point.

Last September, the Wildlife Conservancy and two other organizations brought Jack Mayer, of South Carolina, to Michigan. Dr. Mayer is perhaps the country's foremost authority on wild hogs. After reviewing all available information, Dr. Mayer guessed that Michigan had 3,000 to 5,000 wild hogs. We do know that wild hogs have been confirmed in 67 of our 83 counties and are reproducing rapidly. Dr. Mayer and every other knowledgeable person who has reviewed Michigan's situation has said we have only a small window of opportunity to prevent disaster and that the window is closing fast. The reproductive rate of wild hogs is so high that the population could become unmanageable in a year. Yet, while the problem has been growing steadily for more than six years, the State of Michigan has taken no effective action.

This should be a no-brainer. We should treat the wild hog like a 300-pound cockroach, eliminating them whenever and wherever we can. That means making it illegal to import, raise, or transport live wild hogs in Michigan, and allowing citizens to shoot wild hogs on sight, year-round with minimal restrictions.

This should be simple, yet for the past three years people ostensibly working on a solution have pondered various side issues in misguided attempts to "make everybody happy." The right to raise livestock does not imply the right to raise invasive exotic species that directly threaten the health, safety and welfare of others and the natural resources of the State. If we can't protect ourselves from something as clearly destructive as the wild hog, our environmental defense system is severely flawed, if not broken!

This legislature has the opportunity to give Michigan's natural resources a chance. We urge you to pass necessary legislation without delay. We do not have the time for lawmakers or agencies

to engage in lengthy debates or studies. The faucet leaking wild hogs into our environment must be turned off immediately, and the public must be encouraged, not restricted, in shooting wild hogs. At present, the rules for killing wild hogs are confusing and citizens can't easily get information about concentrations of wild hogs. There needs to be a well-publicized place for citizens to contact to receive and share information on hog sightings and concentrations. The legislature should direct the Departments of Agriculture and Natural Resources to quickly formulate a plan aimed at working with landowners and citizens to eradicate this menace. We can't wait to see what will happen. The wild hog problem will not go away on its own.



# In Pursuit of Boss Hog



John Moyer

Free-roaming wild hogs in the U.S. include Eurasian wild boars (left) and swine of domestic or mixed breeds (right).

In December of 2005, a couple of weeks before Christmas, Dale Bailey and his neighbors a few miles north of St. Charles in Saginaw County got excited about a 200-plus pound, midnight visitor to their backyards. No, it was not Santa running ahead of schedule. It was some kind of wild boar searching for food under bird feeders and shrubbery. With visions of pork tenderloins dancing in their heads, locals spent the waning days of the muzzleloader and archery deer seasons hoping to spot it. But nobody saw the big pig in the neighborhood again.

A restaurant manager in Saginaw had an even closer encounter with a wild boar that same year. He killed a big porker with his car in the Crump area of Bay County not far from a fenced enclosure in northern Midland County where more than a hundred wild boars reportedly broke free several years ago. Supposedly, all but a few dozen were recaptured, but details of the escape are not well documented. The pigs that have shown up in Saginaw County about 30 miles to the south likely originated from that accidental release, but nobody knows for sure.

In northern Midland and Bay Counties, hunters occasionally get night-time photos of wild boars with their tree-mounted cameras. Ron Bates, a Michigan State University swine expert, says there are unconfirmed reports that the growing herd of wild hogs in Midland County already contains 40-

60 animals. In most other areas of southern Michigan, there are a few reports of free-roaming pigs, but the sightings are from widely separated areas.

This past fall on November 15, opening day of the firearms deer season, a hunter killed a feral hog in Gratiot County. Two days later, another hunter shot a huge wild boar in the Perry area of Shiawassee County at least 60 miles south of the Midland County accidental release. All told, state officials confirmed that seven wild hogs were killed—six by hunters and one by a car—during November and the first week of December. These confirmations were in Alpena, Gratiot, Shiawassee, Hillsdale, Roscommon, Midland, and Presque Isle counties. There have also been recent reports of wild hogs in the southern-most tier of Michigan counties including Branch, Hillsdale and Lenawee. And a number of areas of Northern Michigan—both in the Upper and the northeast Lower Peninsulas—have had wild hogs running around for several years.

With ample evidence that feral swine are roaming large areas of the state and breeding, concerns about the adverse consequences of their growing population are escalating.

In November of 2006, the Michigan Department of Agriculture and the DNR issued a joint press release encouraging hunters with a valid hunting license to shoot any kind of feral swine in 23 Michigan counties (map page 5). This was a depar-

ture from the DNR's more ambivalent stance on the issue a few years ago. In 2001, state representative Rich Brown of Baraga County sponsored a bill to allow shooting of wild hogs after some Russian wild boars escaped from an enclosure of the Huron Bay Lodge in the rugged Abbaye Peninsula. Despite the area's deep snows, the escaped hogs seemed to handle life in the wild quite well and were soon raising havoc in gardens and natural vegetation. One wild boar reportedly even menaced a local resident, forcing him to hide in a shed. Brown sought legislative help because DNR officials told his office that nothing could be done about wild hogs because they were not listed as game animals. Brown's bill was opposed by the DNR and was never passed. Local residents apparently took the law into their own hands and solved their hog problem.

By the end of December 2006, another seven counties had been opened to hog hunting, but there is still not much effort being made by state officials to curb the wild hog problem. It is legal to shoot feral swine in the 30 listed counties only because potential owners of the hogs have been contacted and no one claims ownership. But outside those 30 counties, it is unclear whether feral swine can legally be shot.

During this year's brief muzzleloader deer season (December 1-17), Scott Maxon of Sanford and two friends shot six wild boars on private property near West Branch in Ogemaw County. Three weighed between 120 and 150 pounds, two were about 25 to 30 pounds, and one (taken the last day of the season) weighed in at 288 pounds. "We saw hogs throughout the muzzleloader season—one sow had six to eight piglets following her," said Maxon. "We're not really sure where they originally came from, but it's clear they are reproducing in the wild."

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# IN PURSUIT OF BOSS HOG

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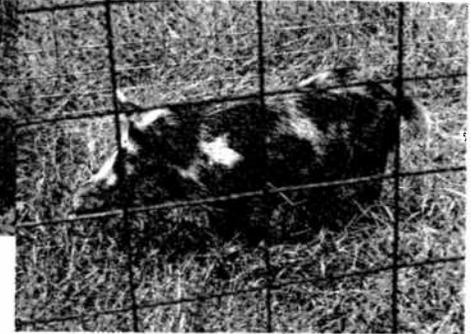
Agriculture and wildlife officials have little information about how many wild hogs roam Michigan or where they are. Interestingly, Shiawassee, Presque Isle and Alpena Counties, where wild boars were killed last fall, were not even among the listed 23 counties where wild hogs "officially" existed as of November. Officials think the animals now going "hog wild" are various combinations of Eurasian wild boars imported and raised for preserve-style hunting by commercial enterprises, and former domestic hogs. Wild hogs, regardless of their origin, can produce more than one litter of three to 12 piglets per year. So, it doesn't take long for a population to explode. Many areas of the American South have large feral hog populations that destroy crops, uproot desirable plants (including rare species) in forests, and can potentially spread diseases to domestic pigs. By the 1980s, wild boars, which were introduced to Tennessee in 1912 through a private hunting preserve, had reduced herbaceous (non-woody) ground cover by 98 percent in some areas of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Nationally, feral swine damage has been conservatively estimated at \$800 million annually.

During the past two years, I learned a little about wild hogs first-hand. On a trip to Louisiana I was amazed to find wild hogs thriving (at least before Katrina struck) in very wet areas of the massive Atchafalaya Swamp. These areas were extremely remote and had only narrow strips of dry ground. Yet, hogs moved in and out of deep



Steve Davenport

Steve Davenport, of Morrice (Shiawassee County) with male boar. Note the large protruding teeth (tusks) which are formidable weapons.



John Munner

A captured hog in a southern state. The light-colored patches indicate the animal has a mixed domestic hog-wild boar ancestry.

water and muck readily. On vacation in Maui in the Hawaiian Islands last year, I noticed a long, 25-foot-wide strip of land at the base of a cliff in a botanical preserve that looked like it had been disked in preparation for planting. A closer look revealed that the ground had actually been churned up by hogs chomping choice roots of rare plants. I had previously read and heard about the adaptability and destructiveness of wild hogs but gained a new appreciation after my experiences in Louisiana and Hawaii.

One myth I sometimes hear in Michigan is that any escaped wild boars or other swine will hang around houses and barns and can quickly be rounded up or at least shot by hunters. That's not necessarily the case; wild hogs that have bad experiences with people quickly learn to avoid them. They become nocturnal and use their keen sense of smell to avoid danger. In areas with large thick woods or swamps, it is almost impossible to eradicate them by hunting.

Should our state be demonstrating more urgency about controlling wild hogs? A growing number of conservationists and agriculture experts involved in the swine production industry think so. Many believe the reproductive capacity of wild hogs is too high for the population to be controlled by incidental shooting by licensed hunters during limited hunting seasons. "State officials just don't get it," says Dr. John J. Mayer, of the Washington Savannah River Company, a South Carolina environmental support firm for the U.S. Department of Energy. The nation's foremost expert on wild hogs, Mayer believes it will likely take a huge catastrophe such as disease outbreak in a state's livestock before effective action against wild hogs will be taken. "State agency personnel simply don't realize how fast wild hogs can reproduce and how damaging they can be," said Mayer. "They can't see the threat until the bomb explodes. And most people don't appreciate the seriousness of the problem until they've had their yard

rototilled by wild boars."

Mayer has studied wild hogs in the U.S. for more than 30 years and noted that for quite a while the number of states with free-roaming wild boars held at 19. But since 1990 the number of states with a wild boar problem has jumped to 32.

MSU's Bates points out that spread of disease to domestic pigs is a real concern even with small numbers of wild hogs. "We spent hundreds of millions of dollars in this country getting rid of pseudorabies, a virus with potentially devastating impacts to domestic swine production. The fear is that wild hogs could carry and transfer the disease to a domestic animal that might be moved through markets and quickly spread the disease. MDA is worried because undocumented wild boars are likely being imported from other states," said Bates.



Terry Spivey, USFWS

Wild boars in the Great Smokey Mountains National Park compete for food with native black bears and have reduced herbaceous (non-woody) ground cover by 98 percent in some areas of the park.



Scott Maxon

Jason Smith of Marne (left), Scott Maxon of Sanford in Midland County (center), and Darian Wright of Midland pose with one of six wild boars they shot in December of 2006 in Ogemaw County.



The Great Smokey Mountains National Park assigns six employees the task of reducing the boar population in the 500,000-acre park. "We shoot or trap an average of about 250 wild boars a year," says park wildlife biologist Bill Stiver. "That doesn't stop damage by hogs to the park which has had the costly hog control program since 1959. And it hasn't stopped the threat of disease. We've found pseudorabies in some of the wild boars," says Stiver. "There are many areas of the South where wild hogs are carrying diseases that could be transmitted to livestock," added Mayer.

The wild boar business in Michigan is booming and essentially unregulated. The demand for wild boars at commercial hunting preserves has increased greatly in recent years because they are relatively cheap. Preserve clients typically pay about \$400 to shoot a boar—much less than the cost for a big white-tailed buck. Wild boar raisers sell them to the preserves for around \$1.25 per pound, several times the going rate for domestic hogs raised for meat. A few years ago many of the wild boars used at Michigan hunting preserves were imported from Canada. Now more Michigan residents are raising them.

Most escapes seem to occur when the hunting preserves release the hogs into large areas fenced to keep in deer. The hogs can lift up or go through typical deer-proof fencing, as I learned at a tour of a facility in Central Michigan that breeds and raises wild boars for the preserves.

While the state regulates both native and exotic deer, there are no rules governing wild boars. Those who buy and sell them don't even have to keep any records.

The January issue of one popular Michigan hunting magazine contained 15 separate ads for wild boar or feral hog hunting in fenced encl-

tures in Michigan. One of the operations reportedly handles more than 600 wild boars annually. Almost all of these preserves are in areas where feral swine have recently been seen.

At present such fenced wildlife enclosures seem like the ballast water in ocean ships that have brought so many harmful exotic species to the Great Lakes—accidents waiting to happen. A careful look at these facilities and a more aggressive, year-round effort to eliminate

free-roaming wild hogs are needed if we are to dodge this environmental bullet. All available evidence indicates it may be too late to eliminate wild hogs from Michigan. State officials are asleep at the switch. ▶

Dr. Patrick J. Ruzs  
Director of Wildlife Programs

Steve Davenport



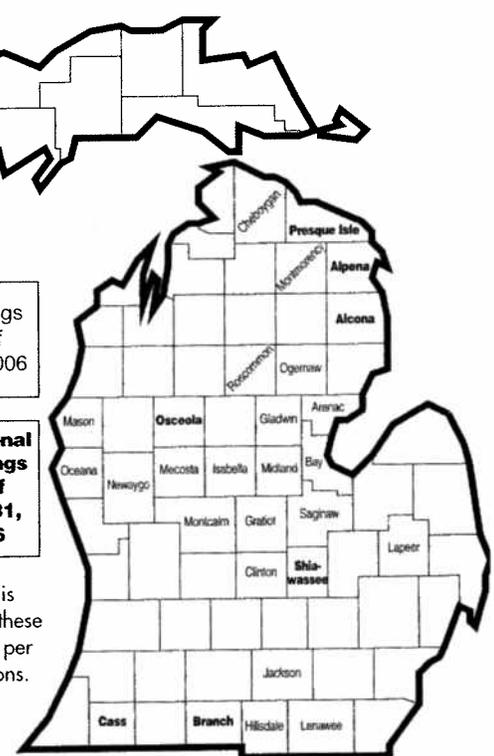
Steve Davenport, of Morrice, killed a nearly 400-pound wild boar during the 2006 deer season.

### COUNTIES WHERE WILD HOGS HAVE BEEN SIGHTED

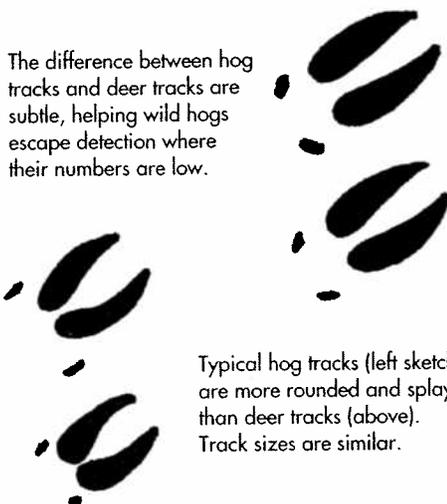
Sightings as of Nov. 2006

Additional Sightings as of Dec. 31, 2006

Hunting is legal in these counties per regulations.



The difference between hog tracks and deer tracks are subtle, helping wild hogs escape detection where their numbers are low.



Typical hog tracks (left sketch) are more rounded and splayed than deer tracks (above). Track sizes are similar.

### THE NATURE OF THE BEAST

- Domestic pigs were derived from the Eurasian wild boar, so all feral swine are of the same species, *Sus scrofa*. They interbreed and the hybrids are sometimes spotted black and tan and often less hairy than the pure wild boar.
- Wild hogs mate any time of the year, but peak breeding seasons in free-roaming herds are usually in winter and early summer. The young are typically born in spring and fall. Litters of 3-12 are the norm. The young have pale, longitudinal stripes until about 6 weeks of age.
- Wild hogs may weigh up to 400 pounds, but most are less than 300. The lifespan is 15 to 25 years. Once they reach maturity, few are killed, as their large tusks are effective in warding off predators. They are fast runners and excellent swimmers. Hog home ranges are usually 10-20 square miles.
- Wild hogs will eat almost anything including birds' eggs and young, insects, mice, roots, crops, woody browse, and carrion. Some have even been known to kill and eat deer fawns. A study in Louisiana found that acorn crops were exhausted twice as fast where hogs were found as in places where they were excluded.

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## Wild Hogs Prove Elusive

**T**om Rousch does not need to be convinced of the destructiveness of wild hogs. The Midland County farmer had his lawn "rototilled" by a band of eight wild boars last fall, and he will spend part of this year repairing the damaged area. Part of an accidental release of up to 100 Eurasian wild boars a few years earlier, the hogs left scars in his woods and elsewhere on his land. They also drew the wrath of some of his neighbors who suffered minor crop damage. But most local residents who have since pursued the animals are not out for revenge or damage control. Instead, they hope to fill their freezers.

They are finding the hogs to be pretty elusive. Now in scattered bands of 5 to 10 animals, the wild hogs, which are reproducing, are sel-

dom seen. They follow drainages with thick cover and are largely nocturnal. Local hunters pursue them almost year-round, but get few opportunities to shoot the once captive boars.

The same scenario is playing out in southwest Saginaw County, where a reported release of about two dozen wild boars in winter of 2006-2007 has attracted many hunters. Only a few pigs have since been shot, as the hogs "wised-up fast."

This information is not surprising to wild hog expert Dr. John Mayer, of South Carolina. "It's almost impossible to control wild hogs by sport hunting," he notes. Mayer has documented hog problems in a growing number of states in the past three decades.

This is not good news for Michigan, which

not only has an abundance of thick swamps, but vast tracts of private lands where hogs can remain relatively undisturbed. Controlling these elusive, exotic animals will be a daunting task. ❁

*Dr. Patrick J. Ruzs  
Director of Wildlife Programs*



The head of a Saginaw County wild boar found along a road. It was turned over to the DNR and Michigan Department of Agriculture for disease testing.

## Wild Boar Problem Grows

**D**uring the past three months, more wild hogs showed up throughout Michigan, evidence of a growing problem with potentially severe consequences. Acting on reports from neighbors, I found (with little effort), three wild boar carcasses (minus most of the meat) in just one square mile in Saginaw County. All three were along a road and were either hit by cars or dumped there after being shot elsewhere.

Citizens who kill or find wild hogs are asked to contact the DNR. The evidence may be helpful in determining where hogs are most abundant. Reasonably fresh parts, especially the head, can be sampled and tested for diseases, something the Michigan Department of Agriculture is very concerned about. Wild hogs carry pseudorabies and several other diseases that could cripple the domestic swine industry.

As reported in the last two issues of *The Wildlife Volunteer*, wild hogs cause \$800 million of damage annually to crops, lawns, fences, and forest resources nationwide. ❁

*Dr. Patrick Ruzs  
Director of Wildlife Programs*



# Worst Fears About Wild Boars Become Reality

In May, the Michigan Department of Agriculture (MDA) confirmed pseudorabies virus (PRV) infection in wild boars on four privately-owned game ranches in Saginaw, Gladwin (2 ranches), and Cheboygan Counties. Pseudorabies is a highly contagious disease of swine that kills piglets. The disease can, but rarely, cause sudden death in cats and dogs, and may affect cattle, sheep, and deer. The virus does not cause illness in humans and is not related to rabies.

“We must protect Michigan’s \$230 million swine industry,” said Don Koivisto, MDA Director. “Michigan achieved PRV-free status in 2000 and the ability of this disease to be spread by feral hogs to other animals could be a risk to the swine industry.”

Over the past 10 years, dozens (maybe hundreds) of wild boars, mostly of Eurasian stock, have escaped from hunting preserves. The hogs lift up or go through typical deer-proof fencing. At least 60 Michigan counties likely have wild boars running around loose.

The MDA plans to destroy all wild boars at the infected facilities, and feral swine (that previously escaped) in the vicinity of the game ranches will be trapped where possible and euthanized by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Wildlife Services. The MDA has notified other states of the disease and is braced for out-of-state markets to impose restrictions on live swine from Michigan.

As part of its response, MDA also banned the importation of swine intended for shooting. Any farms that sold to, or received live swine from the infected facilities were to be quarantined and tested. Violations of the quarantine and ban are punishable



by fines of up to \$50,000 and/or up to five years imprisonment. Additionally, all farms and ranches with commercial or sport swine were quarantined until the swine are tested for PRV.

PRV is transmitted through nasal and oral secretions, food, water, and the environment, and can be carried on car tires, boots, and clothing. Swine may harbor the virus without showing clear signs. More information on the disease can be found on the MDA website at [www.michigan.gov/mda](http://www.michigan.gov/mda) or the USDA website at [www.usda.gov](http://www.usda.gov).

The discovery of pseudorabies in the wild boars is the inevitable result of a booming, and essentially unregulated, business in Michigan. The demand for wild boars at commercial hunting preserves has increased greatly in recent years because they are relatively cheap. Preserve clients typically pay about \$400 to shoot a boar—much less than the cost for a big white-tailed buck. Wild boar raisers sell them to the preserves for around \$1.25 per pound, several times the going rate for domestic hogs raised for meat. A few years ago many of the wild boars used at the Michigan hunting preserves were imported from Canada. Now more Michigan residents are raising them and they have been coming in from southern states. While the state regulates both native and exotic deer, there have been fewer rules governing wild boars. Those who buy and sell them don’t even have to keep any records.

This problem didn’t sneak up on us. There has been ample evidence for several years that action must be taken to stop the release of wild boars. In November of 2006, the MDA and the DNR issued a joint press release encouraging hunters with a valid hunting license to shoot any kind of feral swine in 23 Michigan counties. This was a departure from the DNR’s more ambivalent stance on the issue in previous years. In 2001, state representative Rich Brown of Baraga County sponsored a bill to allow shooting of wild hogs after some Russian wild boars escaped from an enclosure of the Huron Bay Lodge in the rugged Abbaye Peninsula. Despite the area’s deep snows, the escaped hogs seemed to handle life in the wild quite well and were soon raising havoc in gardens and natural vegetation. One wild boar



Igor Burchenkov

reportedly even menaced a local resident, forcing him to hide in a shed. Brown’s bill was opposed by the DNR and was never passed. Local residents apparently took the law into their own hands and solved their hog problem.

By the end of December 2006, another seven counties had been opened to hog hunting, but there was still not much effort being made by state officials to curb the wild hog problem. It is now legal to shoot feral swine (with a valid hunting license) in more than 50 listed counties only because potential owners of the hogs have been contacted and no one claims ownership. But outside those 50 or so coun-

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## WILD BOARS BECOME REALITY *Continued from page 1.*

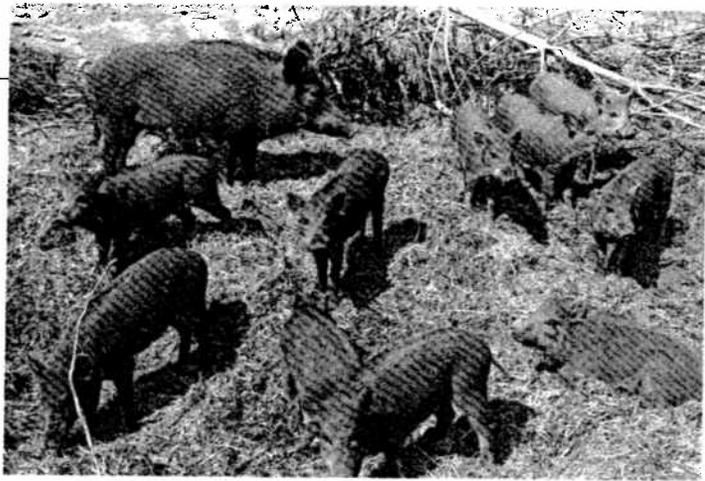
ties, it is unclear whether feral swine can legally be shot.

Wild hogs, regardless of their origin, can produce more than one litter of three to 12 piglets per year. So, it doesn't take long for a population to explode. Many areas of the American South have large feral hog populations that destroy crops, uproot desirable plants (including rare species) in forests, and can potentially spread diseases to domestic pigs. By the 1980s, wild boars, which were introduced to Tennessee in 1912 through a private hunting preserve, had reduced herbaceous (non-woody) ground cover by 98 percent in some areas of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Nationally, feral swine damage has been conservatively estimated at \$800 million annually.

Several government officials and a citizen from Michigan recently attended a Feral Swine Conference in St. Louis, Missouri, where the feral swine's destructive potential and tendency to harbor diseases was emphasized. One of the presenters at the Conference was Dr. John Mayer, of the Washington Savannah River Company, a South Carolina environmental support firm for the U.S. Department of Energy. The nation's foremost expert on wild hogs, Mayer believes it will likely take a huge catastrophe such as disease outbreak in a state's livestock before effective action against wild hogs will be taken. "State agency personnel often don't realize how fast wild hogs can reproduce and how damaging they can be," said Mayer. "They can't see the threat until the bomb explodes. And most people don't appreciate the seriousness of the problem until they've had their yard rototilled by wild boars."

Mayer has studied wild hogs in the U.S. for more than 30 years and noted that for quite a while the number of states with free-roaming wild boars held at 19. But since 1990 the number of states with a wild boar problem has jumped to 32.

The Michigan Wildlife Conservancy is bringing Dr. Mayer into Michigan for



two free educational events this September aimed at increasing awareness about our state's growing problem with wild hogs.

Dr. Mayer will speak at the Chippewa Nature Center in Midland on Saturday, September 13 at 3:30 p.m. and at the Conservancy's Bengel Wildlife Center in Bath northeast of Lansing on Sunday, September 14 at 3:00 p.m.

"The Michigan Wildlife Conservancy thinks it is very important that citizens learn about this serious issue," said the organization's President, David Haywood of Lansing. "It will be impossible to control wild hogs without the help of the Michigan public."

It is hoped Dr. Mayer's visit and recent MDA testimony before the state legislature will help spur new laws to make killing of feral swine legal throughout Michigan, and eliminate wild boars anywhere in the state.

For more information about the September events or Michigan's wild hog problem, contact the Conservancy at 517-641-7677 or email [wildlife@miwildlife.org](mailto:wildlife@miwildlife.org) 

*Dr. Patrick J. Ruz  
Director of Wildlife Programs*



## Feral Hog Problem at Tipping Point

Time is running out if we are to have any chance of avoiding long-term damage by feral hogs to our state's forests, wetlands, and crop fields. Wild hogs, many of Eurasian stock, have been escaping from commercial game ranches in Michigan for at least a decade, and have now been confirmed in at least 63 of Michigan's 83 counties.

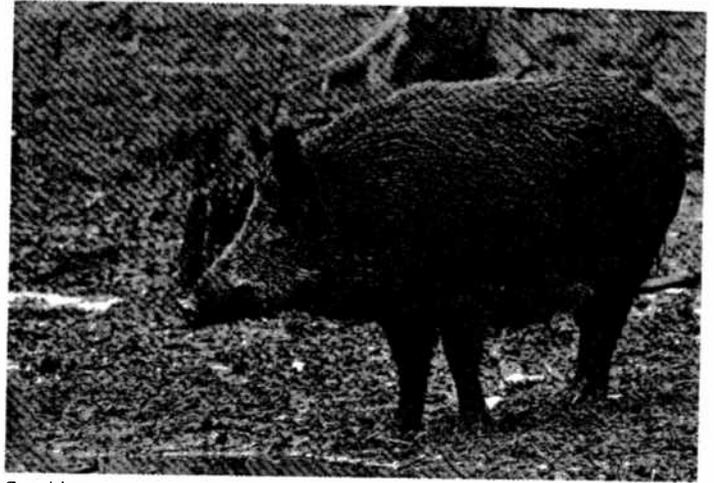
The wild hogs are mostly in small bands of fewer than 20 animals. They have dispersed many miles from the game ranches and are reproducing. State officials have little information on how many are roaming the landscape, but have already received hog-caused crop and forest damage reports in both the Upper and Lower Peninsulas. Biologists recently noted damage in the Pigeon River Country State Forest and state land in Marquette County.

In May, the Michigan Department of Agriculture (MDA) confirmed pseudorabies virus (PRV) in free-roaming hogs in Saginaw and Gratiot Counties as well as in several commercial ranches (see July-August issue of *The Wildlife Volunteer*). That disease is a huge threat to Michigan's domestic swine industry, and the MDA, with help from the DNR and the federal government, is hurriedly mobilizing to enforce quarantines, test animals for disease, and eliminate captive infected hogs. Legislation has been drafted to grant authority to stop the keeping of wild hogs behind fences, but it may be a classic case of the "horse already out of the barn."

In 32 other U.S. states, wild hogs cause an estimated \$800 million dollars worth of damage annually. Once the wild hogs became established, none of those states were able to eliminate hogs despite massive and expensive efforts. Most state agencies in "hog country" have given up on eradicating the animals, which are notorious for eluding hunters and quickly expanding their numbers and range.

The only hope for wild hog control in Michigan is a multi-front assault that involves citizens. The agencies may slow or even halt additional escapes of hogs from fenced areas, but they will not be effective against hogs already loose on private as well as public lands. It is now legal to shoot wild hogs, if the shooter has a valid hunting license, in more than 50 Michigan counties. However based on experiences in Texas, Louisiana, Tennessee, Hawaii and other states where hogs are heavily hunted but damage is nevertheless extensive, hunting will not eliminate hogs.

Most opportunities to kill hogs will be chance encounters when hogs move into crops or on lawns in search of food. If the DNR drops hunting license requirements and allows wild hogs to be killed on sight year-round by anyone, it's possible the hogs could be held in check. It's a long shot, but one we have to try.



Feral hogs are now found in at least 63 Michigan counties.

We have no chance unless Michigan citizens become well-educated about this new menace. But unfortunately, the whole issue has slipped under the public's radar. Few Michigan citizens have any idea what's going on with wild hogs. Most vaguely recall only "reading something" about it in the newspaper.

That has to change. Lack of public pressure on elected officials, and in turn on agency personnel, has gotten us into this mess. We should have seen it coming when game ranches first began importing the pest. But our attitude has long been that if it's not on a list of illegals, it is okay to bring it in. Australia, which learned the hard way, now has a policy that if a plant or animal is not on an approved list, it can't be imported. There's a huge difference in that approach and the system that brought us Eurasian wild boars.

Officials in other states emphasize that we must act now or our slim chance will be gone. With wild hogs capable of producing multiple litters of 3-12 per year, even a few months of delay is detrimental.

As reported in the June 2008 issue of Michigan Farm News, Sam Hines, of the Michigan Pork Producer's Association noted, "I've been told by a number of people in states where they've been struggling with feral swine for years that if they'd have taken action when they were in the position we are now, they'd be in much better shape today. Their advice is to move with all haste."

But, so far, Michigan has not moved with haste. Even though wild hogs have caused damage in other states for over a century, no one moved to regulate Michigan game ranches that imported them, or Michigan residents that began to raise them. State officials routinely walked past herds of wild boars without stopping when inspecting deer, elk and other regulated species at game ranches and breeding facilities. In 2001 the DNR opposed a bill to allow shooting of wild hogs that was introduced after some Russian wild boars escaped from a game ranch in the Upper Peninsula. Some biologists reportedly opined that Russian wild boars were a Southern U.S. species unlikely to survive Michigan's winters. They apparently overlooked the fact

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## **FERAL HOG PROBLEM**

*Continued from page 3.*

that Russian boars evolved in regions of extreme cold and snow. In 2006, MDA and the DNR issued a joint press release encouraging hunters to shoot feral swine. The two agencies stated the need for legislation and control of wild hogs at game ranches. Yet, two years later no legislation has been passed.

The wild hog problem in Michigan is both a crisis and a test. If we can't move quickly to avoid a problem of this magnitude, it will be apparent that our political and administrative networks are too cumbersome to meet serious environmental challenges. ❁

*Dr. Patrick J. Ruzs  
Director of Wildlife Programs*



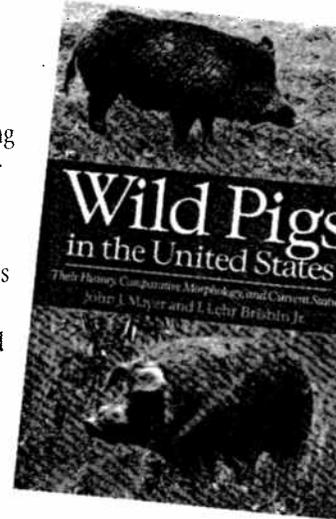
# Hogs Gone Wild

The escalating damage posed by our state's rising wild hog population was in the spotlight this past September. The Michigan Wildlife Conservancy, in partnership with the Michigan Farm Bureau, Michigan Pork Producers Association and the Chippewa Nature Center (in Midland), brought in nationally renowned wild hog expert Dr. John Mayer, of South Carolina. Dr. Mayer put on two public seminars on September 13 and 14, and spent the next day in technical sessions with state officials and representatives of several organizations. More than 160 people heard him speak about wild hogs, their impacts, potential control methods, and related issues (see seminar summary below).

While the seminars were going on, the wild hogs them-

selves — most escapees from game ranches — were creating quite a stir. The Ann Arbor News reported, in a September 13 article by Jo Mathis, that the DNR received about 20 calls from citizens in Scio, Lode and Saline Townships in Washtenaw County who had seen wild hogs in the previous week. Three weeks earlier, in the same county's Augusta Township, two wild hogs reportedly chased a little girl and a homeowner who came to her rescue. Michigan State Police officer, Aaron Darkins, eventually shot both hogs in the homeowner's yard with a rifle.

On September 15, the Detroit Free Press ran a front-page article on the wild hog problem, highlighting hog-caused crop damage in Saginaw and Montcalm Counties. Other newspapers across the state ran similar



Author John Mayer presented two seminars in Michigan on the current dilemmas with wild hogs.

## AUTHOR OF "WILD PIGS IN THE UNITED STATES"

Dr. John Mayer provided some interesting (although alarming) facts about wild hogs when he visited Michigan September 13-15. Dr. Mayer who holds a Ph.D. in zoology from the University of Connecticut, is currently a manager at the Savannah River National Laboratory in Aiken, South Carolina. He has conducted research on wild hogs for over 35 years, focusing on morphology, wild hog systematics, behavior, population biology, reproductive biology, damage/impacts, and management/control techniques. He is the senior author of "Wild Pigs in the United States," which has just been reprinted. Dr. Mayer's work on wild hogs has spanned three continents and included over 20,000 specimens examined/measured.

Dr. Mayer opined that Michigan likely has a lot more hogs than we think — maybe 3,000-5,000 — and excellent habitat for the exotic species. He urged state officials and citizens alike to immediately "pull out all the stops" to curb Michigan's growing hog problem.

Information and observations Dr. Mayer discussed while in Michigan included:

 Wild hogs, including Eurasian wild boars and various boar/domestic swine hybrids, numbered 1-2 million in 19 states in 1990. Today, there are 3-6 million wild hogs in 30 states.

 In addition to escapees from game ranches, wild hogs are often "dumped" into the wild by ill-advised citizens who think of them as desirable game animals.

 Wild pigs can live just about anywhere and eat just about anything. They have few natural predators and a very high reproductive potential.

 Wild hogs compete with turkeys, deer, and other native game species, and feed on native flora, impacting protected species.

 Wild hogs do incredible damage to the environment by their rooting habits. (Hogs can root down as far as four feet into the soil.) This has increased dramatically in developed areas, ruining lawns, golf courses, and parks.

 Wild hogs are infamous for consuming planted tree seedlings and crops, causing hundreds of millions of dollars in damage annually in the U.S.

 Wild hogs are voracious predators of livestock and wild animals. Hogs prey on all kinds of wildlife, including deer fawns, and can kill goats, lambs, sheep, calves, cattle and young horses. In some areas of Australia, wild hogs take 40% of newborn lambs.

 Wild hogs carry brucellosis, pseudorabies virus and other diseases including some that threaten humans and can devastate domestic swine reproduction.

 Car-hog collisions are on the increase with accidents involving 0.5-5.0% of the hog numbers each year. Damages cost about \$36 million annually. The rate of human fatalities is about twice that of car-deer collisions.

 Attacks on humans are rare but do occur.

 Annual removal of 50-75% of the hog population is needed to stabilize or begin reducing wild hog numbers. No single method—e.g., shooting, trapping, use of dogs—can accomplish this. So, a combination of methods and intensive effort is needed. Bounty systems have been employed in other states with varying success. Bounties have usually been used to lower high populations, rather than as a preemptive measure to eradicate small numbers of hogs. Sport hunting alone has not controlled hog populations in any state.



stories, and the topic was discussed on radio and TV. Meanwhile, the state legislature pondered three introduced House Bills to help deal with the problem. One called for restrictions on importing hogs and releasing them inside fences. Another sought similar restrictions for all non-native mammals, and the third would allow anyone with a valid hunting license to shoot a feral wild hog.

The uproar about hogs seemed to fit perfectly the theme of Dr. Mayer's seminars – that "a pig (population) bomb is going off in North America." Wild hogs had been a major problem only in southern states for decades, but recently "exploded" onto the scene in the northern U.S. as game ranches and individuals imported them from Canada and the South, and also provided a market for local hog suppliers. Now, at least 40



Son of Anna and Dan Bekins, on Montcalm County farm where wild boars destroyed crops.

states have growing hog populations, and damages are conservatively estimated at \$800 million annually.

For years, even as wild hogs were escaping from commercial game ranches throughout the state, the problem had slipped under the public's radar. Few citizens realized that an exotic species capable of wreaking havoc on Michigan's agricultural and natural resources was already on the loose. Most of the public was unaware that by spring of 2008 wild hogs had been confirmed in 63 of Michigan's 83 counties, with bands of 20 or so seen in both Peninsulas. For many, the first hint of a problem came in May 2008 when the Michigan Department of Agriculture (MDA) confirmed pseudorabies virus (PRV) in free-roaming hogs in Saginaw and Gratiot Counties as well as in several commercial ranches (see July-August 2008 issues of *The Wildlife Volunteer*). That disease is a huge threat to Michigan's domestic swine industry, and the MDA, with help from the DNR and the federal government, hurriedly mobilized to enforce quarantines, test animals for disease, and eliminate captive infected hogs.

The attention to the hog problems brought by Dr. Mayer's visit and the hog sightings and crop damage in Southern Michigan is important because lack of public pressure on elected officials, and in turn on agency personnel, has gotten us into this mess. Even though wild hogs

have caused damage in other states for over a century, no one moved to regulate Michigan game ranches that imported them, or Michigan residents that began to raise them. State officials routinely walked past herds of wild boars without stopping when inspecting deer, elk and other regulated species at game ranches and breeding facilities. In 2001 the DNR opposed a bill to allow shooting of wild hogs that was introduced after some Russian wild boars escaped from a game ranch in the Upper Peninsula. Some biologists reportedly opined that Russian wild boars were a Southern U.S. species unlikely to survive Michigan's winters. They apparently overlooked the fact that Russian boars evolved in regions of extreme cold and snow. In 2006, MDA and the DNR issued a joint press release encouraging hunters to shoot feral swine. The two agencies stated the need for legislation and control of wild hogs at game ranches. Yet, two years later no legislation has been passed.

Officials in other states emphasize that we must act now or our slim chance will be gone. With wild hogs capable of producing multiple litters of 3-12 per year, even a few months of delay is detrimental. We got a wake-up call this past September. Hopefully, the alarm did not go off too late. ✨

Dr. Patrick J. Ruzs  
Director of Wildlife Programs



# Conservancy Opinion The Case For A Bounty On Wild Hogs

**B**ounty systems have a bad reputation. Historically, they were associated with misguided predator control programs that overlooked the important ecological roles of foxes, coyotes, hawks and other carnivores. Many such programs were poorly administered and cases of fraudulent bounty collections were common.

But a bounty on wild hogs in Michigan has merit. The target would not be a misunderstood predator, but rather, an exotic species that could devastate Michigan's forest, wetlands, crops and livestock. Further, we can design a system, administered perhaps by County Conservation Districts or other local entities, which would avoid many of the past pitfalls.

Wild hogs, many descendants of pure Eurasian wild boar, have been escaping from commercial

game ranches in Michigan for a decade or more, and have now been confirmed in at least 63 of Michigan's 83 counties. Most are in bands of fewer than 20 animals, but wild hogs have dispersed many miles from the game ranches and are reproducing. They are already causing crop and forest damage, and pseudorabies virus was found in free-roaming wild hogs shot in Saginaw County. That prompted quarantines of game ranches, as pseudorabies is a huge threat to Michigan's domestic swine industry. (See related articles in 2008 issues of *The Wildlife Volunteer*.)

Officials in other states have emphasized that we must act now or our narrow window of opportunity will be gone. With wild hogs capable of producing multiple litters of 3-12 per year, even a few months of delay in implementing an effective control program is detrimental. We have been told, repeatedly, by the experts to pull out all the stops. So, what are our options?

Clearly, we can't wait for government to eliminate the wild hogs. The agencies charged with taking the lead on hog control—the Michigan Department of Agriculture and (secondarily) the DNR—may eventually slow or even halt additional escapes of hogs from game ranches and other fenced areas but they will not be effective against



Igor Brchenkov

hogs already roaming loose on private as well as public lands. Dr. John Mayer, the country's foremost expert on wild hogs, thinks Michigan might already have 3,000 – 5,000 wild hogs and the habitat to support a huge population. A multi-front assault that involves citizens is desperately needed.

Sport hunting has not controlled hogs in other states, and by itself, sport hunting will be ineffective in Michigan. In other states, bounty systems were not tried until the hog populations got out of control. The systems (predictably) ran out of money

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The Michigan Wildlife Conservancy is a non-profit membership organization that restores and conserves fish, wildlife and habitat, and trains others to do the same.

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## Hunters Urged to Report Wild Hogs

**T**he November 24 deer hunt of Breckenridge's Greg Austin on a Gratiot County farm took on a new twist when he got a tip from the landowner. The farmer told him that a big pig was feeding in a filter strip planted for erosion control. Soon after, Austin shot a male wild boar that appeared to weigh 120-140 pounds.

Dr. Patrick Rusz, Director of Wildlife Programs for the Michigan Wildlife Conservancy, met with Austin a few hours later and obtained blood and tissue samples for disease testing by state pathologists. The information gained from Austin and the wild hog he shot, along with data from other hunters who encountered hogs while afield, is vital if Michigan is to avoid damage from the exotic species.

"Wild hogs are so scattered that biologists can't easily get a handle on their numbers or distribution," said Dr. Rusz. "The 750,000 deer hunters who get out each fall are our best means of finding out where the hogs are. Hunters like Mr. Austin are doing a great service when they report spotting or shooting hogs."

The hog Austin shot on November 24 appeared to be alone, it was a young male that had barely-visible tusks. The fur length and color were consistent with that of a Eurasian wild boar rather than a hybrid. It was smaller than wild boars typically put out for shooting at commercial game ranches, so it likely was evidence of hog reproduction in the wild, not a recent escape. Another wild boar was shot this fall about five miles away.

Even if the reports come in too late for samples to be taken, the information is still valuable. Hunters are urged to contact the DNR to report encounters with hogs while afield.\*

## **BOUNTY ON WILD HOGS** *Continued from page 2.*

before the hog numbers were reduced substantially. But there is no question that bounties in other states led to more hogs being shot, and therein lies some hope for Michigan. Since the wild hog population is still at a somewhat low level, a carefully crafted bounty system could be cost-effective. If for example, the state now has a total population of 5,000 wild hogs and a \$100 per animal bounty was offered, it would not cost much over \$500,000 even if the bounty system eradicated every hog. Next year,

state officials plan to spend at least \$1 million just for hog disease testing and other activities mostly at the game ranches and other facilities from which the animals are escaping. And we're just starting to count the economic costs of hog damage to farmer's crops and forests in Michigan. So, an effective bounty system would by comparison be a cost-effective bargain.

Is a bounty on wild hogs a sure-fire solution? No, but it is the best tool available in Michigan's

current situation. We need citizens to shoot wild hogs at every opportunity and a bounty system would draw attention to that need and provide motivation. This would not be "another coyote bounty" but a bold attempt to save Michigan's citizens a lot of grief from an exotic species the likes of which we have never experienced here. We can't afford not to try. ❁

## **Hog Bounty Program Up and Running In U.P.**

**T**he Delta County Conservation District is administering a privately-funded program aimed at eradicating, or at least reducing, the number of wild hogs in the Central Upper Peninsula. The two-year pilot program got started in mid-April with funding from the U.P. Whitetails organization and the District.

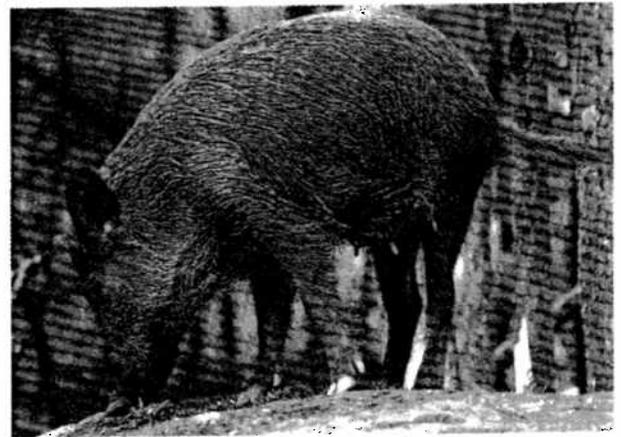
In early January, the Michigan Wildlife Conservancy had publicly called for hog bounties across the state to avoid serious, long-term damage to Michigan's agricultural and natural resources. Nationwide, wild hogs conservatively cause \$800 million worth of damage annually to crops, golf courses, lawns and forests by their feeding and rooting habits. They are also vicious predators of livestock, deer fawns and ground-nesting birds.

Wild hogs, including descendants of Eurasian wild boars, have been escaping from commercial game ranches in our state for a decade or more, and

have now been confirmed in 67 of Michigan's 83 counties. They are reproducing in the wild and are already causing crop and forest damage. Pseudorabies, a viral disease that is a huge threat to the domestic swine industry, has been found in several free-roaming wild hogs in Michigan.

The Conservancy believes bounty systems will draw attention to the need for citizens to shoot wild hogs at every opportunity. The program administered by the District primarily targets hogs in Delta and Marquette County, but citizens throughout the U.P. can turn in wild hogs for bounty payments of \$85 for adult females, \$50 for adult males, and \$15 for sub-adult hogs. The program also encourages citizens to phone-in

reports of wild hog sightings to the District at 906-428-4706, ext 3. Volunteers will follow-up on the reports and attempt to direct hunters to areas with concentrations of wild hogs. ❁



*Wild hogs threaten Michigan's agricultural and natural resources.*