

Outdoors

Mixed feelings about wild hogs

Several comments have appeared recently in Texas outdoor publications about the ever-growing numbers of wild hogs in our state. Reading between the lines, you'll notice that the writers' attitudes toward the pigs seem somewhat conflicted.

That's because the landowners whose property is habitat for the uninvited porkers is also leased to deer hunters, and deer hunters tend to regard wild hogs as an extra added attraction on their leases, one that offers opportunities for both sport and meat, year-'round in some cases.

Ranchers, on the other hand, see the hogs as vermin, plain and simple. Very few landholders have successfully converted the feral swine herd into a cash crop, and the pigs represent a net loss on the ranch books.

They're very prolific; a sow can have two litters a year and a litter can number up to a dozen or more piglets. The little females become mothers at a very early age, and the hog herd multiplies alarmingly. In the meantime, all the adult hogs on a ranch have the famous porcine appetite, and forage by rooting.

An adult wild hog can move more dirt in a night than you might with a small backhoe, and tends to select the worst possible places on the ranch to do it. Tank dams, roads and planted fields are favorites, as are any areas where the soil has been loosened, as by clearing brush. In croplands, the destruction has been compared to what might be accomplished by a plowman gone insane.

Hogs will work on a deer feeder until they bring it down, and then tear it apart to get at the corn. I've watched a big boar aggressively drive away whitetail deer that approached a feeder until he had consumed every kernel of corn. Then he lay down under the feeder to wait for the next feeding.

The swine can be tough on fences, too, bursting through them like low-slung bulldozers, and a hole in a fence can wreck years of carefully controlled and expensive livestock (or game) breeding programs. Needless to say, of course, such holes can permit valuable animals to escape ... or unwelcome ones to enter.

Most city folks never give a thought to wild hogs as dangerous predators, but old boars not only kill and eat lambs and other small livestock as well as deer fawns, but finish off and devour any wounded animals they find — including other hogs.

In rare cases they can even be dangerous to humans, especially when wounded or brought to bay by hounds.

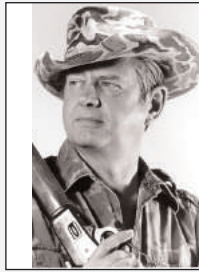
No wonder ranchers tend to welcome trustworthy persons who're willing to shoot hogs.

Not that it helps much.



Hunt resident Leon Treiber poses with a big wild boar he shot on the Wootters ranch while deer hunting. Guests were routinely advised that if they let a hog get away alive, they wouldn't be invited back!

Currently Outdoors



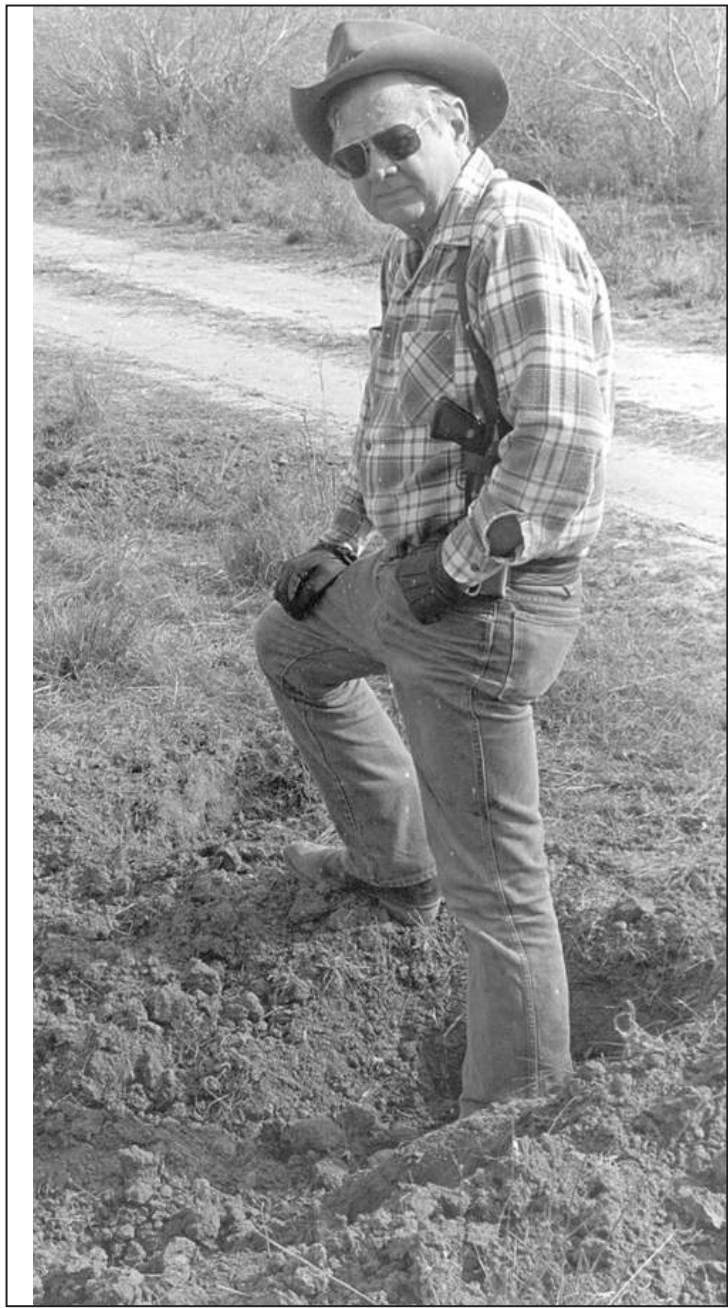
John Wootters

For 22 years I shot every hog I could get a gun on on my Webb County ranch, day or night, year-'round, and begged guests to do the same. When I sold the ranch it seemed to have about as many hogs as when I bought it. Wild hogs can be live-trapped and removed from the property wholesale, so to speak, but the reduction in numbers will be only temporary unless the place is surrounded by a hog-proof fence ... which is not as easy as one that is merely deer-proof.

If you suspect that I have exaggerated the difficulty of dealing with wild swine, consider this; researchers into animal intelligence have concluded that the IQ of hogs easily equals that of some breeds of dogs. If you hunt them for very long, you will come to agree with that evaluation. Their wariness is positively eerie at times; you will find yourself wondering if it's possible that they can read your mind ... at a distance!

They are also very tough; I shot a 250-pound boar one night with a 300-grain .45-70 hollow-pointed bullet which struck him halfway between the eye and ear. He dropped in his tracks, of course, and I started walking toward him, so sure of my shot that I didn't bother to reload my single-shot rifle. Before I got to him, however, the "dead" boar started kicking!

I paused to think that over and decided that I was scared



The author stands in an example of wild hog rooting on his South Texas ranch. The porcine excavation might have just as easily been in the middle of the ranch road in the background.

of anything that could live over a bullet in the brain, so I reloaded and shot him again in the heart, which quieted him.

Autopsy revealed that the first bullet had not only failed to penetrate the skull, but hadn't even cracked it! Since that night, I've "paid the insurance" on every boar I've shot, just like we do on "dead" African Cape buffalo bulls, which are famous for getting up and killing people.

John Wootters is a semi-retired outdoors writer with more than 30 years experience. He was editor of Petersen's Hunting magazine and author of the monthly column "Buck Sense" and has written the all-time best selling book on deer hunting, "Hunting Trophy Deer." He has served on the Board of Directors of the National Rifle Association, and written for Shooting Times, Rifle, Handloader, Guns & Ammo and Petersen's Hunting magazines.