



## Wild Hogs: They're Mean, They're Bad, And They're Here To Stay!

In 1982, hunting clubs were springing up all over eastern Texas. After years of being spotlighted, hunted with dogs, and poached, deer were making a comeback. One day I received the first of many calls about wild hogs. "We've formed a hunting club," the fellow said, "and we want to diversify our hunting by adding some wild boars." He asked me where he might get some animals to stock. "You really don't want to do that," I countered.

But he was resolute about stocking hogs. I gave him the name of several clubs that wanted to get rid of some of their hogs. I knew I'd hear from this guy again. Sure enough, almost three years to the day, he called back and asked if I remembered him. "Sure do," I said. "I suppose you want to know how to get rid of your hogs?"

He seemed surprised that I had expected his call. Then I clued him in

on some published trap designs, as well as some professional hunters. I ended the conversation by telling him that his club would have hogs long after we both were dead.

### A GROWING MENACE

Fortunately, I now receive very few calls about stocking hogs, but a host of others about getting rid of these pests. No one knows for sure when the first hogs appeared on this continent, but they did not get here accidentally. In fact, the first ones probably arrived with Columbus and the Spanish conquistadors.

Traveling through the new land, Spanish explorers carried with them a diverse community of soldiers, clergymen, adventurers and Indian guides. To feed this small "army," they herded goats, hogs and cattle. Some of these animals escaped into the wild. Hogs in particular were very adept at getting away because

they are one of the smartest domesticated meat animals.

### AMERICANIZED HOGS

The hogs escaping Spanish explorers did not differ much from their wild ancestors in Europe. If you traveled back to the early 1500s, the hogs being herded along Spanish trails would have looked more like European wild boars than the breeds of today. Yet there were two significant differences. Unlike their foreign cousins, the soon-to-be "Americanized" hogs had no real breeding season and they had much larger litters.

These hogs also had to be hardy and vicious enough to protect themselves against an abundance of predators. Their keen intelligence and sharp tusks made them a formidable foe. With one slicing bite, they could sever the leg of a coyote or bobcat. In addition, they were omnivorous (eating almost anything).

Hogs were popular as meat animals because of their incredible reproductive rate. Sows could reproduce at around 3 to 6 months of age (or earlier), and they could produce several litters a year. A friend of mine once proclaimed: "A wild pig will drop 10 piglets and raise 12!"

So, once liberated, hogs began to increase at an incredible rate. Even if a sow produces only two litters a year, each averaging only four survivors, the biological potential of this one animal is nearly 600 offspring in just three years!

### HOGS VS. DEER

Pigs can respond to favorable growing conditions much faster than whitetails. In fact, they can out-compete whitetails on almost any range. Today, we estimate wild hogs have spread into about half the United States, including Hawaii! Most recently, hog sightings have been reported in Kentucky, Illinois, Kansas, Missouri, Ohio and Colorado. In the Midwest, expanding hog populations could be devastating

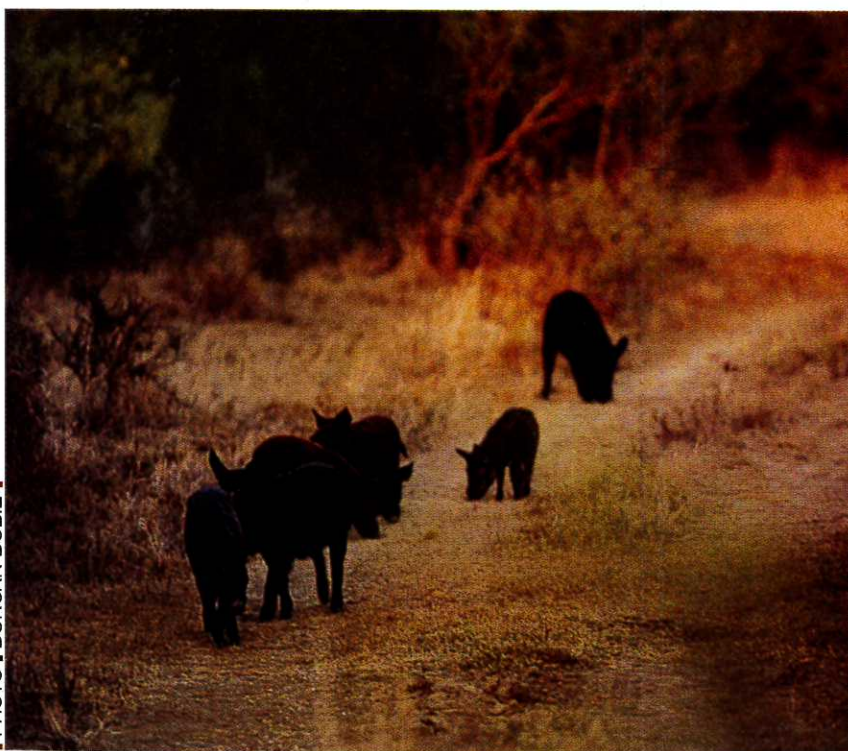


PHOTO | DUNCAN DOBIE

Land managers should encourage the shooting of wild hogs whenever possible. But even through hunting, trapping and other means, you'll probably never be able to totally get rid of them once they become established.



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## HOGS

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It's understandable why hunters began looking at wild pigs as an exciting alternative to native game. They really are more difficult to hunt than deer. And once they get a whiff of human scent, they become really wary. However, once they become established, there really is no way to exterminate them. The only realistic thing you can do is to try to hold their population at some low level.

But are hogs really a problem? In most cases, feral animals (domestic animals gone wild) and exotics (axis, fallow and sika deer) have potential for significant habitat damage and disease transmission. Hogs are no different. Diseases such as tuberculosis, pseudorabies, brucellosis, leptospirosis, tularemia, trichinosis, plague, anthrax, and various exotic diseases such as foot and mouth disease, African swine fever, hog cholera and swine vesicular disease are known to occur in pigs.

Parasites, including roundworms, liver flukes, kidney worms, lungworms, stomach worms and whipworms (all of which deer are susceptible to), are also common in pigs. Outside of disease issues, the biggest problems hogs represent lie in two areas: agricultural damage and direct competition with deer.

In one night, a small herd of hogs can tear up an acre of crops. In most cases, they're not eating the crops. Rather they're searching for their favorite food item: earthworms. As omnivores, hogs relish a variety of foods, including snakes, small animals, roots, insects, ground-nesting-bird eggs, grain and carrion. Yet given a choice, they will select earthworms over any of these foods. And since small food plots are now a regular part of the whitetail scene, many suffer significant hog damage.

Deer and hogs do not get along well. The sight of a big boar is enough to send most deer running from a feeding area. Once there, the hogs quickly root up large areas of the plot, taking it totally out of production. In oak stands, hogs "Hoover up" the acorns, especially in years with low mast production.

Several years ago, I conducted an intensive study on impacts of feral hogs on deer. We found a significant amount of fawn remains in large hog

stomachs, but there was no way to establish whether or not the hogs killed and ate the fawns, or simply scavenged on them. However, there are reliable reports from sheep and goat ranchers about direct predation by hogs on their animals. The truth probably lies somewhere in between, but wild hogs do have the potential to be significant predators.

Our study did record one positive impact by wild hogs. Their rooting activities, although destructive initially, tended to keep plant communities in the early stages of succession, which provides the best forbs (weeds) for deer. Yet this certainly is not justification to keep hogs around.



PHOTO ■ DUNCAN DOBIE

One reason hogs have become such a problem is their incredible reproductive capacity. According to Dr. Deer, if a sow produces two litters a year, each averaging only four survivors, the biological potential of this one animal is nearly 600 pigs in just three years.

## CONTROL MEASURES

So, what can you do about the hog problem on your land? First, support regulations that prevent the intentional release of hogs in your area. In Texas, for example, there is a state-funded program, the Texas Feral Hog Abatement Pilot Project. Precipitated by the volume of complaints by landowners, as well as the shocking estimate of 1.5 million hogs in Texas, the program studies and measures the economic impacts of managing feral hogs in agricultural areas.

The second thing you can do is to

implement a sound control program. If you live in a state where feeding is legal for deer, you should hog-proof your feeding areas. Free-choice feeders can either be surrounded with net wire (4 feet high) or three electric wires. Electricity is very effective against hogs since they are so intelligent. The first wire should be about 8 inches above the ground, with the other two positioned 8 to 10 inches apart above the base wire. You can obtain a solar-charged system at a modest price at almost any farm and ranch store. Keep the fence "hot," since hogs will test it periodically.

## OTHER METHODS

Hunting alone never works as a control measure, but you should encourage the shooting of hogs whenever possible. Unfortunately, some states still consider them a game animal, and you should work politically to remove such regulations. The best time to kill hogs is late winter since that is when their populations are highest and they are the most vulnerable. Focus on bottomlands and wet areas, which constitute their preferred habitat.

Trapping is the most effective means of control, but it takes a great deal of effort. Numerous trap designs are available on the Internet. Most traps allow hogs to either enter or root their way into a large pen. I recommend putting a top on your traps since hogs are very good climbers. Snares have been used to catch hogs (where legal), but snares are not species specific, resulting in non-target animals being killed or injured.

Hog trapping has evolved into a small industry. Europeans relish wild hog meat, and even prefer the stronger taste of older animals. In Texas, there are operations that will pay as much as 55 cents per pound for wild hogs. The larger the hog, the more you get per pound. Putting a price on their heads certainly helps.

In many areas hunting wild hogs with dogs has increased in popularity. However, some states take a dim view of such activities since animal rights advocates are pushing to make this type of hunting illegal. Where legal, it is an exciting sport, and when it's done properly, I do not believe it should be considered unduly "cruel."

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In some states a permit to control hogs by aerial shooting can be obtained by landowners. In most cases, a small two-seater helicopter is used to find and pursue herds of mixed-age hogs. Using either a shotgun loaded with buckshot or a semi-automatic rifle, the gunner can quickly kill a large percentage of the resident population. However, this method is limited anywhere the habitat is too thick to see hogs from the air.

## WHAT ABOUT CONTRACEPTION?

Recently, there have been several funding initiatives to develop control measures for wild hogs using some biological control mechanism such as disease, or using contraception. These efforts are foolhardy and will not be successful. Here's why.

To date, there is no effective contraceptive system that can be used on large mammals such as deer and wild hogs. The cost is just too high. The only successful ventures in deer involved very isolated populations and frequent treatment by volunteers. The next problem lies in delivery of the chemical. There are a host of animals that share feeding habits with wild hogs. Placing a contraceptive in some bait might get the chemical into some hogs, but other non-target animals also would be affected.

Any pathologic organism also would have the same problem, since there are no diseases specific enough to hogs. Some landowners have taken the matter into their own hands, using highly illegal poisons to kill wild hogs. However, the danger of killing other animals, not to mention the legalities, should prohibit such actions.

Wild hogs are here to stay! As American farmers and ranchers leave the land in record numbers, it's ironic that in some areas wild hogs are replacing them in even higher numbers. At best, we all should work together to ensure that no new areas are stocked with these pests, and they should be shot, trapped or pursued whenever possible. The European boar is a great game animal in its native land, but it's one of our more serious pests here in the U.S. ■

# On Target

BY STEVE BARTYLLA

## Muzzleloading Madness

**W**hen I first took to the woods at age 12 with a firearm in hand, I was armed with a trusty .30-30. It wasn't until years after college that I finally upgraded to a .30-06 and a high-powered scope. Until that point, my iron-sighted .30-30 was responsible for every firearms deer I ever shot.

Later on while bowhunting, as bucks often stood 100 yards away mocking me, I frequently wished I was armed with that old .30-30. With it I knew I could legitimately take shots as far out as 125 yards, and sometimes even at 150 yards if everything was perfect.

Enter the modern in-line muzzleloader. These "primitive" weapons shoot accurately at twice the range of my old .30-30, which

major leap they've made in the past decade or so. Although virtually every aspect of in-line muzzleloaders has seen some improvement, there are three major areas where modern technology has made them practically irresistible.

### EASE OF USE

Luckily for hunters, the days of cumbersome loading and seemingly endless hours of cleaning are gone. Today, the major players in the muzzleloading arena all appear to have embraced the K.I.S.S. marketing strategy: Keep It Simple Stupid.

This point was clearly made when I interviewed Jim Bruno, vice president of sales and marketing for Traditions Performance Firearms.



PHOTO BY STEVE BARTYLLA

Three great muzzleloaders: from top to bottom, the Knight Revolution, the Traditions Pursuit XLT, and the Thompson/Center Encore 209x50 Magnum.

now sits in my gun safe. In-lines are safer and can even be reloaded faster. By comparison, they make my old .30-30 look like the "primitive" weapon.

That amazing realization is what inspired me to take a closer look at today's in-lines and explore the

"Traditions' goal is to make muzzleloaders easy to load, easy to shoot and easy to clean," Jim stated. "We try to make it easy on the consumer by supplying REDI-PAKS. These packages include the rifle, some with scopes, as well as all of the

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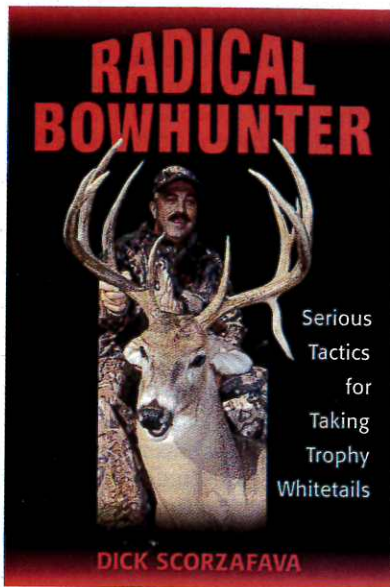


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## RADICAL BOWHUNTER, BY DICK SCORZAFAVA

Dick Scorzafava is a well-known outdoor writer in New England, but his new book, *Radical Bowhunter*, contains good information for whitetail hunters everywhere. This book really gets down to basics and offers a lot of good insight on techniques and using the latest high-tech gear from a man who has hunted widely across North America. The book emphasizes a lot of commonsense, creative tactics that produce results.

*Radical Bowhunter* is 224 pages,



softbound, with numerous photos. It's available in bookstores for \$19.95 or directly from Stackpole Books. Call 1-800-732-3669 or go online to [www.sales@stackpolebooks.com](http://www.sales@stackpolebooks.com).

### FOR YOUR INFORMATION

This is the final issue of *North American Whitetail* until July. The July 2007 issue will be sent to subscribers in early June. Until then, be sure to visit our Web site, [NorthAmericanWhitetail.com](http://NorthAmericanWhitetail.com), for current news and information about all facets of hunting across North America. Also, if you have any questions, comments or ideas about stories we've run in recent months, or ideas about stories you'd like to see in the magazine, please let us know. E-mail your comments to us at [whitetail@primedia.com](mailto:whitetail@primedia.com).

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loading and cleaning supplies a hunter needs. We also supply an instructional video to teach the buyer how to use and care for the new muzzleloader."

Though many advances in the in-line market have resulted in easier use, perhaps no advancement has been more significant than the introduction of removable breech plugs. Not surprisingly, this innovation has dramatically reduced the once laborious chore of cleaning to a relatively simple task.

"A major recent advancement for us is the 'Speed Breech,'" revealed Neil Sanders, director of marketing for Thompson/Center Arms. "We actually had it in the design phase for two years before releasing it.

**It's apparent that today's muzzleloaders have evolved well beyond their "primitive weapons" designation.**

Our goal was to have a breech plug that could be easily removed by a one-quarter or 90-degree turn, while minimizing blowback and keeping the threads clean.

"By adding three rings at the tip of the breech plug to act like piston rings in a combustion engine, we were able to eliminate 95 percent of the blowback. Furthermore, after accomplishing our goal of having a breech plug that required only a one-quarter turn to be removed, we were confident we had it down. Then, after test-firing 250 consecutive rounds without removing the breech plug, we knew it was ready for the market after the breech plug still popped right out."

Ease of use can also encompass limiting the punishment that in-line muzzleloaders have long been known to inflict. With advances like Thompson/Center's ingenious FlexTech recoil system, making a 150-grain load feel like 100 grains has gone a long way toward solving that problem.

## ACCURACY

Of course, ease of use means little if the ability to hit the target is missing. A major factor in the increased accuracy of today's muzzleloaders lies in barrel quality. Today's fast-twist barrels increase bullet spin, leading to increased accuracy. Furthermore, some of today's muzzleloaders offer heavier, free-floating barrels that can accurately reach out well beyond 200 yards.

Major advances in sabot-style bullets have also played an important role in today's pinpoint accuracy.

"In the past, sabot bullets were sometimes hard to load and the barrel always had to be cleaned after the second or third shot," Jim Bruno said. "But sabots did offer ballistic advantages in accuracy, energy transfer and weight retention. Belted-style bullets were easier to load, but they didn't expand as well as sabots and the blow-by caused them to lose knockdown power at longer distances when compared to sabots. Now, however, after much improvement, sabot bullets are a breeze to use."

## EFFICIENCY

The efficiency of modern muzzleloaders can hardly be compared to their predecessors. A good example is the 209 ignition system. Now used by most in-lines on the market, this is a vast improvement over the musket caps of old. The greatest advantage of the 209 ignition system lies in the fact that it causes the powder to burn much hotter, and this in turn utilizes *all* the powder. The result: Much greater efficiency and increased range.

## CONCLUSION

It's apparent that today's muzzleloaders have evolved well beyond their "primitive weapons" designation. With better ammunition, accuracies of well over 200 yards with good stopping power, reduced recoil and ease of cleaning, it's safe to say that today's generation of in-lines are more effective and more user-friendly than ever before. Technology is an amazing thing! ■