

# Something



average 180 pounds, but occasionally reach 250 to 330 pounds. Adult females are slightly smaller, averaging 150 pounds. Both sexes have been known to live 10 to 12 years in the wild.

## **Biology**

Although the European wild boar tracks look similar to those of a deer, the hoof of the boar is more rounded and the dew claws are lower on the foot. Also, when the dew claws of deer are present with the hoof print, they appear directly behind the toes. Dew claw impressions with boar tracks are outside the main print.

Wild boars travel in herds of up to 12 individuals. A herd can contain several sows and their piglets. An adult sow commonly travels only with her young. Adult males usually travel alone. Only during breeding periods are the adult males usually seen with the sow-piglet groups. Boars may be active anytime of the day or night, although activity normally occurs during daylight. Sow and piglet groups usually travel the least. Male boar may cover as much as four miles per day. Old

*By Tom Dotson*

The ancestors of West Virginia's European wild boar were imported to Tennessee in 1912 and supposedly came from the Ural Mountains of Russia. Many people have never seen a wild boar and could easily confuse it with its relative, the domestic hog. The wild boar is taller and heavier in the

shoulders than in the hips. A boar's canine teeth are well developed with the male's lower set developing into large, sharp tusks. The wild boar's pelt is comprised of bristle-like hair and may vary in color from jet black to brown, salt-and-pepper, and lead gray. Some boars may have white facial marks. Adult males

logging roads, game trails, ridge tops and stream courses are commonly used as travel routes. Nearly all boar movement can be related to food availability. When food sources are abundant, movement is limited. When food is scarce, boars may range extensively.

Wild boars spend most of their

# Wild About Boar

time searching the ground for food and their eyesight has adapted for that purpose. As a result, boars have difficulty focusing on distant objects. The wild boar is omnivorous, feeding on whatever is most plentiful and easiest to secure. Summer foods include blackberries, huckleberries, apples, herbs, roots, insects, crayfish, salamanders and snakes. During fall, boars feed almost exclusively on the mast of oaks, hickory and beech. They prefer white oak acorns. Winter and spring foods include ferns, roots and any remaining mast that can be found.

Like domestic hogs, wild boar will dig muddy, oval-shaped depressions called wallows. This activity helps control insect pests and regulates body temperature during summer months. Wallows are most frequently located in wet depressions along trails or in small streams with slow-moving water. The surrounding ground and vegetation are usually trampled and smeared with mud. After leaving a wallow, boars rub their bodies against small trees or brush to further rid themselves of insect pests. Rubbing trees are most often found near wallows, but may also occur on or near boar trails.

The honing of tusks, referred to as tusking, is another sign of boar activity. Boars select small saplings as tusking sites. A tusked tree is similar to a buck rub, but boar tracks, hair and the presence of rubbed trees leave no question as to the animal involved.

Both male and female boars are capable of breeding before they are one year old. Females usually have one litter of one to five piglets each year. Most breeding takes place in

either fall or winter when oak and hickory mast are available. Therefore, most litters are born December through March. Another peak in litter production occurs April through June, but is less productive.

## History

Deer, turkey and black bear have historically experienced difficulty in maintaining populations in southern West Virginia. This meant big game seasons were severely restricted. While looking for ways to expand hunting opportunities, DNR biologists noted that wild boars were doing well in mountainous eastern Tennessee under conditions similar to southern West Virginia. Biologists felt that boar could withstand harassment from dogs better than deer and reproduce faster than both black bear and deer. So a feasibility study to introduce wild boar into southwestern West Virginia was conducted in 1970. After completion of the study, a 45-square-mile area in Boone and Logan counties was selected as the release site. In May of 1972, 30 wild boar (14 males and 16 females) from a game farm in Tennessee were released in the Spruce-Laurel drainage of Boone County. Biologists released an additional 12 boar that had been kept at the State Wildlife Center at French Creek in 1973.



Jeff Craig

Following an initial evaluation of the stocking by a West Virginia University graduate student, a limited permit season was initiated in 1979. Hunters harvested three boars. An archery season that coincided with deer archery season was added in 1986. Biologists gradually increased the number of permits through 1988 when 79 boars were killed. The wild boar season consisted of three days in early November. After a boar research study to learn more about boar behavior, range and population density was completed in 1989, biologists initiated a split season by adding a late December season to the early November season. They also increased the number of permits to 6,000. From 1989 through 1995 the kill increased from 59 to 158.

## Current Status

By 2000, the harvest of wild boar had declined to 46. In 2003, biologists reduced the season to a late October season and eliminated the requirement to apply for a permit. A single firearms season scheduled in late October was designed to reduce the harvest and

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provide boars the additional time needed to occupy more productive habitats. Biologists do not believe that boar hunting contributed to the population decline. Past seasons have been short and hunter participation restricted by permits. However, biologists deemed season restrictions as the only acceptable method to increase populations. Traditionally, hunters have been less successful during the early gun season. Weather conditions are usually warm and dry and leaf fall makes boar and boar sign more difficult to find.

Biologists conducted an extensive survey in February 2004 to confirm the presence or absence of wild boar in areas known to have supported boar in the past. The survey indicated a much reduced boar population of probably fewer than 50 animals.

### **Why Are Wild Boar Declining?**

Wild boars are a poor pioneering species. Good boar habitat contains a high abundance of mast-producing trees, primarily mature oak forest. In the 1980s and early 1990s, mature oak forest covered much of the boar area in Casey Creek, Sycamore Creek, Jigley Fork and Skin Poplar Fork. In the past, more than 75 percent of the boar harvest came from these areas.

Biologists hypothesize that the main reason for the decline of wild boar in Boone, Logan, Raleigh and Wyoming counties is habitat destruction resulting in poor reproduction and survival. Since the mid-1980s, mountaintop removal mining and logging have accelerated and removed vast tracts of mast-producing trees in main Spruce-Laurel

Creek, Sycamore Creek, Dennison Fork, Jigley Fork and Skin Poplar Fork. Clearly, much of the ideal oak forest habitat favored by the wild boar has disappeared.

Wild boar populations may have also been negatively affected by poaching and predation. Poach-

scattered over a larger area. This is cause for cautious optimism. However, accelerated mining activity continues to degrade habitat and limit hunter access. As a result, the future of West Virginia's wild boar is still uncertain.

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*Sharp tusks are found on male boars and help differentiate it from domestic hogs.*

ing has always been a problem in the area, but the high reproductive potential of the wild boar, one to five piglets per sow per year in good habitat, had allowed the boar to continue expanding their populations. The coyote has expanded its range and is undoubtedly influencing the boar population despite the boar's reputation of defending their young. Black bears are also more abundant in the area and are probably significant predators on piglets and shoats, yearling boars.

Since the season changes in 2003, the boar harvest has shown progressive, though modest, increases. Hunters report more sign