

# WILDLIFE TRENDS

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## Trapping Feral Hogs

By: Dr. Keith Causey

**F**or years I have hunted feral hogs with bow and gun from Texas to South Carolina. I'll readily admit they are enjoyable to hunt and even more enjoyable to cook and eat. However, I also truly believe that native North American plants and animals have no worse enemy than feral pigs once they become established in a given habitat.

Over the past couple decades there has been an alarming spread of feral pigs into heretofore unoccupied habitats throughout the Southeast and other regions of the U.S. Feral hogs are predators, scavengers and herbivores. They destroy the nests and eggs of ground-nesting birds, reptiles, and amphibians. Their habit of rooting up the soil when they feed is often disastrous to North American plants that have not evolved tolerance to this particular behavior of this "non-native" species. To paraphrase the advertising slogan of an Alabama-based wood company, "Believe me, you don't want 'em!"

*Land managers should develop a control strategy at the first evidence of feral pig presence. I believe a determined and persistent trapping program is the only really effective means of maintaining some control over these highly intelligent and adaptive creatures.*

Feral pigs showed up on my personal property in east-central Alabama in 1991, and I have waged a losing battle trying to get rid of them ever since. I have trapped and shot hundreds of these creatures during the past 10 years, but they are still there in great numbers. Feral pigs have a reproductive potential equal to that of rabbits, but they have few natural enemies. Using a conserva-

tive litter size of 4-5, feral pigs have the ability to double their population about every 5-6 months. Feral pig control is a difficult task and permanently ridding them from a particular habitat is practically impossible.

Land managers should develop a control strategy at the first evidence of feral pig pres-



Feral hogs along a woods road. A far too common sight in the Southeast U.S.

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Feral hogs rooting causes many problems in forestry, agriculture and wildlife management.

ence. I believe a determined and persistent trapping program is the only really effective means of maintaining some control over these highly intelligent and adaptive creatures.

Hog traps come in many shapes and sizes, ranging from large corral traps to portable “root-door” cages and even electronically monitored drop-net systems. I have had most success trapping pigs using a moderate sized, semi-portable drop-door trap that evolved by trial and error over the past 10 years. [Editors Note: This trap design is featured in this month's Build It Section.] It is constructed of 60-inch high welded horse panels, 5-foot metal T-posts (actually about 7-feet long, 2 feet on bottom is in the ground), and an 8-foot high wood-framed drop door. This trap is 3-sided using 8 foot sections of horse panels tapering to the drop-door. I place a trap on or near a well-used pig trail or in an area of recent feeding or rooting activity. My favorite bait is whole kernel corn. Other people have other favorites. I run a “string” or line of corn from the trap to the pig trail or activity area. I place a large amount (5 - 10 pounds) of corn inside the trap and check it daily

until pigs find the corn. Once pigs go into the trap and eat all the corn for two consecutive nights, I set the trap and wait. I have captured as many as 23 pigs in a single trap. Once trapped, pigs are killed and as many as possible are butchered for food.

Feral pigs respond most readily to bait when natural foods are limited. Usually this is after the first hard frost and before spring “green-up”. However, I have had good success from late summer until the following mid-summer. My poorest success has been from late June through late August.

Feral hog trapping is a time-consuming and often expensive endeavor. Any expectations of

reasonable feral pig control is predicated on one's willingness to initiate and **continue** to trap. The problem will likely never go away.

*Dr. Keith Causey is a professional Wildlife Scientist with over 35 years of experience in wildlife research and management. Dr. Causey's speciality is white-tailed deer but he has become an expert on trapping feral hogs by necessity. He owns property which is cursed with an abundant feral hog population. He has found it nearly impossible to implement wildlife management programs without first controlling hogs.*



Typical feral hog drop gate trap. The “Build It” section in this issue shows construction is easy.