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— Janet Byers

Janet Byers surveys the freshly overturned dirt in her yard, part of the damage caused early Tuesday by the rooting of a herd of wild pigs.

Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel



Wild pigs damage Corralitos yard

Garden trampled by rooting herd

By DAVE BROCKMANN
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CORRALITOS — Deer, raccoons, skunks and even an occasional gopher snake have become friends of Janet and Terry Byers at their Pleasant Valley Road home.

But, wild pigs? No thanks.

Early Tuesday morning, a herd of wild pigs invaded their front yard, leaving behind a freshly rototilled 50- by 100-foot lawn area as they ran off into the night.

"We woke up at 1:30 a.m. when the motion sensor went off. My husband went to the front door, called me to come and see what had happened," Janet explained as she surveyed the damage. "After opening the door, they darted off."

The wild pigs trampled through the garden, circled the citrus tree, and surveyed the perennials planted nearby before bulldozing the lawn area, Janet said.

"You can see the snout marks in the dirt."

During the winter months, wild pigs eat roots, bulbs, insects and worms by plowing or "rooting" the ground with their tough snouts. Two weeks ago, the Byers' experienced a similar attack at 3 a.m. Down the road, another Corralitos woman lost her entire front lawn to the nocturnal mammals.

Wild pigs have long been common in rural areas of the county, particularly along the North Coast. They wallow in the springs at Big Basin Redwoods State

Park eating acorns and native iris, and churn lawns from Bonny Doon to the Forest of Nisene Marks State Park in Aptos.

But landowners and ranchers have been hogtied in their fight against controlling these porkers. The state Department of Fish and Game has implemented a management plan, but many residents say that even the relaxed regulations don't go far enough, soon enough to control the bumper crop of wild pigs.

The management plan steps up both sport and depredation hunting — the killing of nuisance animals — as the "most practical, cost-effective means of controlling wild pigs and their impacts on property and natural resources." On Tuesday, Carmel Babich, a Fish and Game Department warden, issued such a permit to the Byers after inspecting the damage to their property.

Fish and Game officials said they have issued about 30 depredation permits countywide this year.

The depredation permit allows the Byers to kill a specified number of animals during the next two months.

There are two other types of depredation permits available. A property owner can select licensed hunters to enter the damaged property during legal hunting hours to kill two pigs per day. Or, the separate Fish and Game Commission can — with landowner consent — declare a special wild pig sport hunt on lands severely damaged by pigs.

James Nee, a biologist with the county's Department of Agriculture, says the primary concentration of wild pigs has been around Nisene Marks State Park and the North Coast. "We have not heard that much about pigs in that area (Corralitos) before," he said.

Wild pigs

The "wild pig" in California is a cross between the pure-strain European wild boar introduced to the state in Monterey County during the mid-1920s and the free-roaming swine released by early settlers.

Size: In the Central Coast area, wild pigs weigh about 150 pounds when 3 years old. Wild pigs can weigh as much as 250 pounds when 6 years old.

Food: Wild pigs are omnivorous, their diet changing with the season. During the dry summer months pigs eat green plants. In the autumn they consume acorns, walnuts, and fruit when available. During winter, when rains soften the soil, wild pigs eat roots, bulbs, insects and worms that they locate by plowing or "rooting" the ground with their tough snouts. In the spring, they gradually shift back to green plant parts.

Reproduction: Wild pigs can first breed when 6 or 7 months old and can produce one to two litters per year with up to 10 piglets each. In the Central Coast area, females typically produce one litter per year with a litter size of 4 to 6 piglets.

Public safety: Normally, people need not worry about being attacked by wild pigs. Pigs are usually nocturnal and have a keen sense of smell and poor eyesight.