

# Wild pigs rampant at Wilder

## 215 killed by crews so far

By **BRIAN SEALS**

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SANTA CRUZ — State parks crews knew the wild pig population was extensive when they began trapping the animals in February at Wilder Ranch State Park.

But killing 215 of the animals was surprising.

"It's more than I expected," said Chris Spohrer, a state parks resource ecologist overseeing the pig control effort.

About six to eight pigs per week are trapped and killed, Spohrer said, and that is only a partial effort.

State parks crews have trapped 69 pigs in Big Basin State Park in the past six weeks, Spohrer said.

Call it a sign of the wildlife times.

For the past 16 years or so the creatures have wallowed in waterways, tilled pastures, munched on flower and vegetable gardens and freaked out more than a few pets.

Just this summer, Cabrillo College became the latest high-profile property to grapple with the problem. The creatures have been plaguing Bonny Doon residents' gardens in recent months also.

While the problem is countywide, state parks has attacked it by taking the bull by the horns. Or the pig by the snout in this case.

"We've explored other options," Spohrer said. "This is really the only viable solution. It's kind of a grim business nobody wants to deal with."

Nobody really knows how many wild pigs roam the coastal hills and mountains of Santa Cruz County.

The swine increasingly are reported gormandizing in North County.

Lud McCrary said the pig population shows no signs of abating on his Santa Cruz County ranch. He's been fighting them since shortly after they

## Pigs

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appeared here around 1984. He's shot and trapped 42.

"If we could have got with it back then, we might have had a chance," McCrary said.

Outside park boundaries, there are nine active depredation permits issued in the county, said Lt. Dennis Baldwin of state Fish and Game. There have been 23 issued this year. Most of those have been issued in North County.

But that number doesn't illustrate the extent of the wild pig population.

Under a new state law, six of the permits issued this year are valid for one year and have no limit on the number of pigs that can be killed, though landowners are required to report any

they kill.

Landowners are allowed to kill the animals without a permit when they are encountered damaging property.

Experts say trapping and killing are the most efficient ways to rid properties of the pigs, but the county may never get rid of them.

The pigs procreate at a rate that could make a rabbit blush, producing up to two litters per year at up to 10 or so per litter. They'll eat anything they can get their snout on, including snakes and other reptiles, small rodents and insect grubs, as well as vegetation and nuts.

Spohrer said state park's program will continue for the foreseeable future.

"If we were to stop now, the population would be back to where it was in short order," Spohrer said.

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## Wild Pig *Sus scrofa*

**SIZE:** Ranges from about 3 to 5 feet in length. Can grow to 400 pounds, but generally 125 pounds.

**FOOD:** Known to eat just about anything including snakes, other reptiles, rodents. Also insect grubs, plant bulbs, mushrooms and acorns.

**RANGE:** Have been found in 49 of 56 California counties. Are believed to have been introduced in eastern Monterey County about 1926. Are commonly found in mountainous, forested areas of North America.

**REPRODUCTION:** Can produce two litters per year, with litters of four to 10.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Agriculture