

Animals



Faith Raider

Following a nocturnal visit by wild pigs, the once-manicured lawns of this Corralitos home were turned into something that 'looks like a war zone.'

Attack of wild pigs leaves yard looking like a war zone

By FAITH RAIDER
STAFF WRITER

CORRALITOS — It's easy to ignore the wild pig problem in Santa Cruz County until the 150-pound pests visit your home.

That's what a Corralitos homeowner found this weekend when she discovered the formerly manicured lawn around her house torn apart as though visited by a fleet of giant gophers.

"Before it hit me, did I care?" said the woman, who asked not to be identified because she lives

alone.

For the past three nights, she has received visits from the intruders. The morning after they made their first appearance, she thought her home had been vandalized.

"It's awful. It looks like a war zone," she said.

Then she realized her lawn had been rototilled by packs of wild pigs that have become infamous in other parts of the county. She thinks the pigs came to her secluded home

about a mile from the Corralitos market and over the hill from the

wooded Eureka Canyon area apparently looking for the bugs and worms she inadvertently attracted by watering her lawn.

None of her neighbors have reported seeing the pigs, but she said she has seen them enough for everyone. She estimates the pigs have done about \$2,000 worth of damage to three lawns surrounding her house.

Last night a hunter sanctioned by the state agency that deals with wild pigs camped out at her

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home until 1 p.m., but left before the pigs returned at 5 a.m., the woman said.

Surveying the wreckage of her lawn, she said, "Can you imagine what this is going to cost? And I don't even know if it's covered under homeowners (insurance)," she said.

She soon found out that it wasn't.

Wild pigs have roamed the Central Coast since about 1970, according to the county Agricultural Commissioner's Office.

The non-native species is a cross between a strain of European wild boar and domestic swine. They are not considered dangerous to humans unless their piglets are threatened.

Long the bane of farmers and landowners in Davenport and farther north, farmers and ranchers in and around Watsonville have reported visits from the marauding beasts with increasing frequency.

In the last few years, the nocturnal beasts have churned up wooded, grazing and crop land in the for-

est of Nisene Marks, Mt. Madonna county park and on private land in Eureka Canyon and elsewhere in South County.

A clerk at the Corralitos Market said customers come in every week with wild pigs they want smoked, cut and wrapped or turned into sausages for their own use. Although the market processes the meat, it does not sell it.

Wild pigs are frequent visitors to the Nisene Marks area in Aptos but until now have paid few home visits in Corralitos, said Jim Nee, an inspector with the Commissioner's Office.

He receives about one or two calls a week about the pigs, primarily from North County, he said.

Under California Fish and Game regulations, sport hunters may kill the pigs during daylight hours without a permit, but homeowners must apply for special depredation permits to slaughter the nocturnal animals at night when they venture out from their refuges in thick brush.

"It's not a sport hunting thing at all," he said.

These and other rules have been criticized by the Santa Cruz County

Farm Bureau and others who charge that they make it difficult for landowners to kill problem pigs.

Most troublesome are regulations that require a landowner to dress the carcass of a slaughtered pig and bring it to a charitable organization. Also problematic is that Fish and Game is understaffed and may not send a warden out to issue a permit until after the pigs have moved on, the Bureau has said.

Because the woman whose home has been plagued by the pigs has an emergency situation on her hands, Fish and Game immediately sent a sanctioned pig hunter to her house last night.

If the hunter had killed a pig, he would have had to gut it and put it into a cooler until the agency could pick up the carcass and take it to an organization that feeds the poor.

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