

## Wild hog caught at Navasota pantry

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BY ROSEMARY SMITH, Examiner editor |

Christian Community Services Director Pat Gaston got her Christmas wish as she found a 45-pound wild hog caught in a trap placed behind the Navasota food pantry on Christmas morning. The boar is believed to have been raised as a local pet, which is not only dangerous, but also against the local city ordinance, according to professional trapper and HogBusters owner Steve Stribling of Navasota.

Gaston contacted the City of Navasota after the boar was spotted on the property approximately 2 weeks ago. The city then contacted Stribling who immediately set up the trap.

"At first I thought it was a strange-looking dog, but when it turned its head, I saw its snout and ears and thought, 'Holy cow, that's a pig!' I've seen armadillos and raccoons here, and things like that, but I had not seen anything like this, and I figured we needed to call somebody and get it off of here (food pantry property)," said the pantry director of 7 years, who added that 2 food pantry clients remained in their vehicle when they too spotted the hog.

"We have so many elderly or handicapped (food pantry clients) or small children that come on this property that I don't need them coming up to the front hurting themselves trying to get away, or (a wild hog) injuring them. It's my first sighting and, hopefully, the last," said Gaston.

Stribling said the pantry director and clients did the right thing by staying away from the hog and calling the city for help, as wild boars are very dangerous, regardless of their age or size. Not only do they charge at people, and can possibly severely puncture or even kill a person with their 1- to 3-inch tusks, but also have the ability to bite a person's finger off with their sharp teeth, according to reports.

"I've never seen a wounded hog run away, and we've shot at them with every caliber of gun before. They will charge," said Stribling, who founded HogBusters in 2006, and has hunted wild hogs for the past 30 years. "They're notorious for finding a major artery (using their tusks), and if they do, you're done."

Though wild hogs are an unusual sighting within the city limits, Stribling said it appears the hog had been domesticated, as it had a piece of cloth wrapped around a hind leg, and wasn't as aggressive as the typical wild hog.

However, they are a common sighting in counties across Texas, and do major damage to local farmlands. Grimes County Extension Agent Shane Jennings said feral hogs are a serious detriment to Grimes County landowners.

"With beef and forage production being the primary Ag commodity produced in Grimes County, feral hogs can cause lots of damage to useable pastureland. Not only do the hogs tramp and root in the fields, damaging a forage crop or cattle grazing land, but they have also been known to prey on lambs and kid goats as well," Jennings said.

Extension Agent Jennings said the feral hog population would continue to increase, as the significantly prolific animals produce an average of 2 litters per year, averaging 4 to 8 piglets per litter.

Grand Star Ranch owner Joe Fauth said thanks to continuous trapping and hunting efforts, he and 2 neighbors, who live in the southern part of Grimes County off SH 105, have caught and killed over 50 hogs over the past 3 years.

"As far as damage, two of my pastures look like practice fields for the US Armies mortar fire training. These pastures then have to be smoothed and, in many cases, reseeded or sprigged," said Fauth.

He added that 4 or 5 hogs can do enough damage in one night to keep him and a tractor busy for 3 to 4 days.

"Hogs are very hard to hunt, because they usually do their damage at night," said Fauth.

Fauth's granddaughter, Sarah Fauth, even lent a hand to help local ranchers reduce the rampant feral hog problem. This past week, the High Point Elementary School student helped her grandfather trap a small hog in southern Grimes County during Christmas break.

The 7-year-old said, "Someone has to stop these rascals. They are doing too much damage in the pastures."

Stribling couldn't agree more, and said he has even approached Texas Department of Agriculture Commissioner Todd Staples about the matter.

Both Fauth and Stribling said the hogs travel the creek bottoms and are on the move incessantly. Stribling, whose company also covers four other area counties, said the wild hogs have even been spotted near roadways, local subdivisions just inside or outside city limits and even on golf courses.

"Just when you think they are gone or have moved on, here they come again and start their rooting all over again," said Fauth. "If a sow has a litter of 12, and say half are female, those babies will breed and have their own litter in the same year. Therefore, that one sow birthing that one litter could be responsible for upwards of 84 offspring, and hogs breed and deliver more than once a year. So a couple of hogs can be a lot of hogs in a very short period of time."

#### Feral hog abatement

According to Texas AgriLife Extension, the Texas Legislature provided \$1 million for feral hog abatement to the Texas Department of Agriculture for the 2008-09 Biennium. That money was provided through a grant to Texas AgriLife Extension Services-Wildlife Services program to conduct statewide abatement projects for a 2-year period, from March 1, 2008 through Feb. 28, 2010.

The AgriLife Website states, "The overall damage from feral hogs has been variously estimated anywhere from \$50 to \$500 per hog per year."

It also states that during the first year of the grant, Texas AgriLife Extension Services-Wildlife Services removed 24,350 feral hogs. During the second year of the project, they removed 23,057 feral hogs for a total of 47,407 feral hogs during the grant period. The average cost per hog removal during the 2-year project was \$19.69 per hog.

According to Texas AgriLife Extension Publication L-1925 "Managing Feral Hog Damage," control methods used to manage a feral hog problem include using snares, live traps, hunting with dogs and shooting them are all effective methods used to control hogs. It states that through various research demonstrations, live traps have shown to be one of the most effective ways to capture wild hogs. Residents are encouraged to consult with an experienced professional or County Extension Agent for the most practical trap designs when necessary. Additional information is available at the Grimes County Extension Office.

"This is an ongoing problem throughout the State. We're so close to the Navasota River, we just want people to know they (wild hogs) are dangerous, and to call the police department or animal control (if a wild boar is spotted)," said Stribling who is leaving the trap at the pantry for a few extra weeks as a precaution.



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