

Ministry of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry

Annual Report on Invasive Wild Pig Sightings: 2020–2021

Wild pigs are an invasive species, and they are not native in North America. They compete with native wildlife for food, destroy agricultural crops through rooting and trampling, and can prey on native plant and animal species. Wild pigs carry and transmit over 80 diseases, viruses, and parasites that may be contracted by native wildlife, livestock, and humans. In many parts of North America, their populations are increasing.

A wild pig is any pig that is not contained or under the physical control of any person, or is otherwise roaming freely, including Eurasian wild boar, domestic pigs, pot bellied pigs, and hybrids (Figure 1).

Once established, wild pigs are difficult to manage. Sport hunting has been ineffective at controlling them and has unintentionally accelerated their spread in other North American jurisdictions. Where hunting is allowed, it is used to reduce numbers temporarily in a particular area or for recreational purposes, and not as an eradication method. Unlike Ontario's native big game species, invasive wild pigs live in large social groups called "sounders" and have very high reproductive rates. To eradicate wild pigs, the entire sounder

must be removed so that the remaining wild pigs don't scatter, become nocturnal, and evade detection and further control efforts.

The most effective way to manage wild pigs is to prevent initial establishment. The Ministry of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry (NDMNR) is committed to preventing the establishment of invasive wild pigs in Ontario. In January 2020, the ministry initiated a pilot study to monitor, detect, and, if necessary, trap and remove invasive



Figure 1. Wild pigs in Ontario may be pot bellied pigs (top, photo Lana Besley), domestic pigs (middle), Eurasian wild boar (bottom), or hybrids (not shown).

wild pigs from the environment. Findings from the pilot study continue to inform Ontario's approach to wild pig management, including Ontario's *Strategy to Address the Threat of Invasive Wild Pigs*.

Summarized here are wild pig sightings reported in Ontario between April 1, 2020 to March 31, 2021 (unless otherwise noted). Reports submitted during this time include sightings of wild pigs observed on the landscape as long ago as July 2009. Duplicate sightings of the same pig(s) have been removed because, in some instances, up to eight different people have reported the same pig(s). Sightings were excluded if the reporter was unsure if what they saw or heard was a pig.

The number of wild pig reports over time (Figure 2) was higher during warmer months and when more media stories covering wild pigs occurred. The number of wild pig reports was highest shortly after media outlets ran stories about wild pigs.

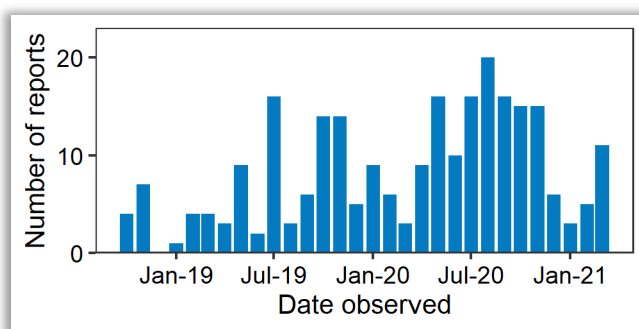


Figure 2. Number of wild pig reports by month; pigs observed October 2018 to March 2021.

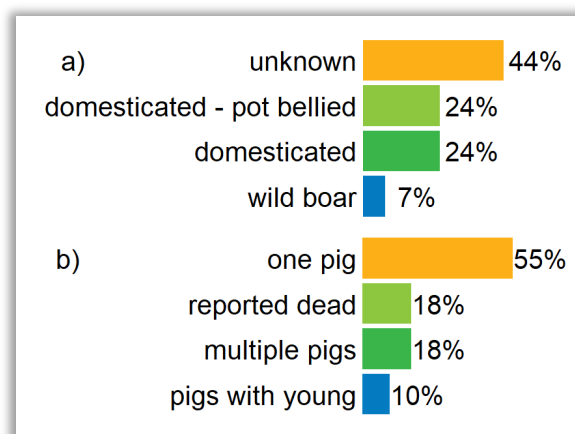


Figure 3. Types (a) and group sizes (b) of wild pigs reported in Ontario between April 1, 2020 and March 31, 2021.

Some reports were of Eurasian wild boar that had either escaped captivity or were found dead (Figure 3). Research from other jurisdictions in North America indicates that these animals are more likely to survive and reproduce in the wild than their domestic counterparts. Most verified wild pig sightings (verified by photo evidence or by ministry staff) were domestic pigs, including pot bellied pigs (Figure 3). Many of these were owned pigs that had escaped from their enclosures and were recaptured by their owners after being reported.

On average, the ministry received 9 unique wild pig sightings per month. For on-site investigations, staff prioritized the sightings where reported pigs posed a greater risk of establishing a breeding population or that posed a threat to property, livestock, or human health. Research technicians investigated all reports of live, verified

Eurasian wild boar. Most reports of wild pigs in Ontario were of a single pig (Figure 3); sightings of more than 7 pigs were usually escaped domesticated pigs. Since wild pigs usually live in large family groups, this finding indicates that it is less likely that wild pigs are established in the province.

Most wild pig sightings occurred in southern, central, and eastern Ontario; sightings in northern Ontario were rare (Figure 5). Ministry staff followed up on all sightings through email or phone conversations and conducted more in-depth investigations at 33 locations in the province (Figure 5).

In total, ministry staff spent 109 days in the field investigating sightings of concern, although the team was affected by adherence to COVID-19 guidelines. Staff drove more than 28,000 kilometres, had more than 475 conversations with residents, left information notes at an additional 925 residences, and obtained permission to visit 53 properties representing 2,904 hectares of land. In some cases, trail cameras were set up at multiple sites in a location.

During the pilot study, staff trapped and humanely euthanized one Eurasian wild boar and directly facilitated the recapture and return of a family of eight wild pigs to their farm (Figure 4). Overall, 30% of sightings reported to the ministry were resolved; in these cases, wild pigs are now



Figure 4. Wild pigs inside corral traps in southern Ontario. Photos NDMNRF.

known to be owned, recaptured, or dead. The ministry continues to closely monitor invasive wild pigs throughout the province, and staff will continue to monitor sightings, investigate cases, and, where necessary, trap and remove wild pigs through 2021 and beyond.

Research and on-site investigations revealed that wild pigs in Ontario are originating from captivity; for example, wild boar were most likely to be found near wild boar farms. Evidence does not suggest that wild pigs are invading from neighbouring jurisdictions, nor does it indicate presence of breeding, self-sustaining wild pigs in mainland Ontario. A small, isolated group of wild pigs has been reported on a private island.

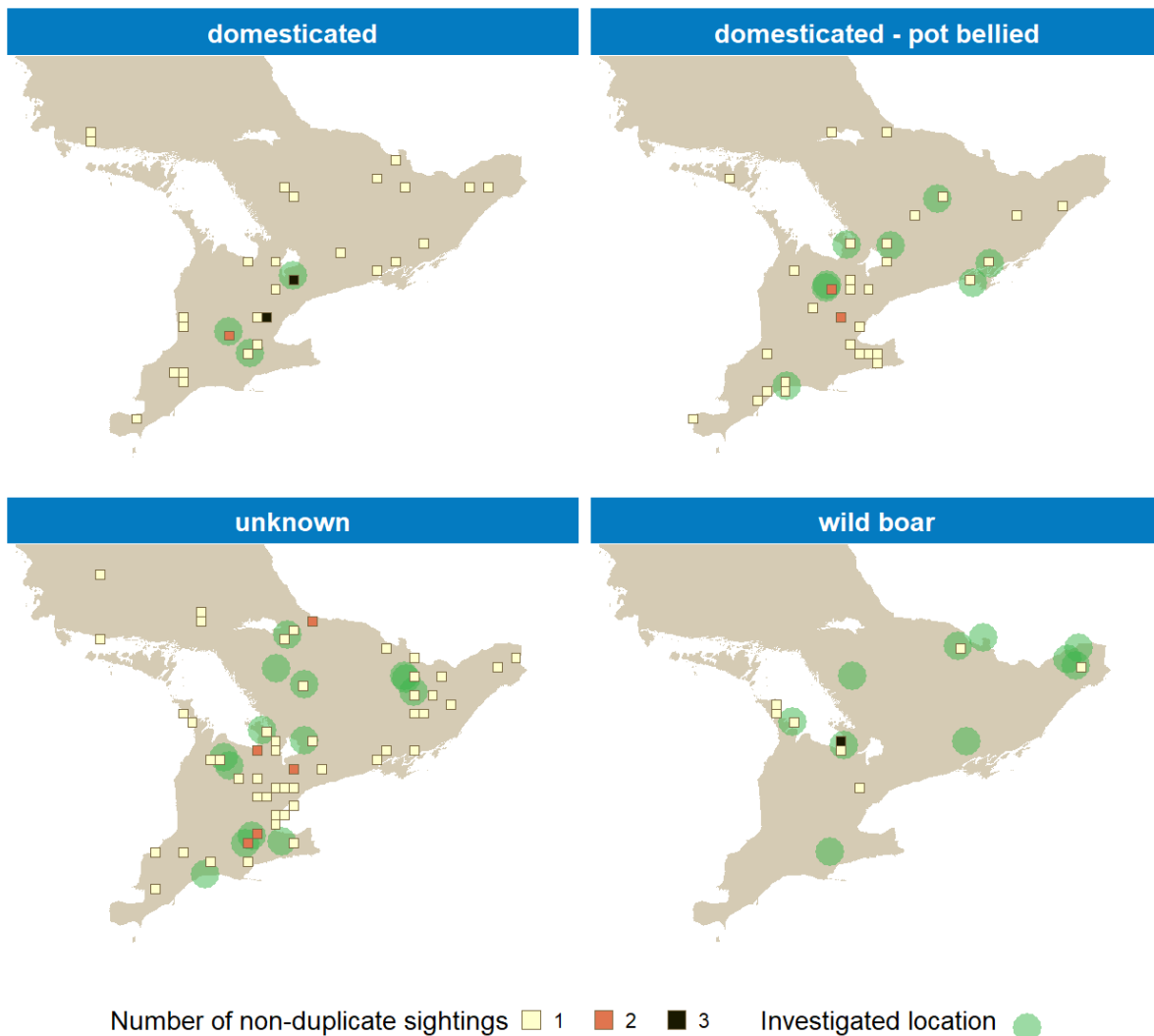


Figure 5. Sightings of wild pigs (domesticated, pot bellied, Eurasian wild boar, and hybrid pigs outside a fence) in Ontario reported between April 1, 2020 and March 31, 2021 but seen on the landscape as early as July 2009. Two sightings of unknown pigs near Fort Frances and Kenora are not shown. Maps include sightings defined as “resolved” — including dead or removed wild pigs, owned pet pigs, and recently escaped or free roaming livestock that have since returned to captivity. The ministry investigated wild pig sightings between January 2020 and March 2021; these locations are highlighted in green. If an investigated location does not overlap with a sighting, it is because the sighting occurred before April 2020 or was determined through investigation to be another species (e.g., raccoon, coyote).



Figure 6. Ministry staff place trail cameras and set corral traps to detect and remove wild pigs in Ontario. Photos NDMNRF.

The ministry recognizes the importance of the prevention, early detection, early response, and eradication of invasive species that could pose a threat to Ontario's biodiversity. As such, the ministry is taking action to prevent invasive wild pigs from establishing in the province (Figure 6). Given the ecological and economic risks associated with wild pigs and the challenges associated with eradication once they become established, early and aggressive action to remove wild pigs is cost-effective over the long term.

This research would not be possible without the many Ontarians who have reported their wild pig sightings. The ministry thanks everyone who reached out for their participation in our monitoring program.

Have you seen a wild pig? Please continue to report your sightings to wildpigs@ontario.ca.

Some of the information in this document may not be compatible with assistive technologies. If you need any of the information in an alternate format, please contact info.mnrfscience@ontario.ca.

Read last year's report here: [Annual report on invasive wild pigs sightings 2019-2020](#).

For additional support and guidance, refer to the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs' fact sheets. For pig owners, ensure that your pigs are contained (Figure 7). For more information, see [best practices for keeping your livestock contained](#) and [fencing for outdoor pig production](#). For community members, see [dealing with escaped livestock in your community](#).



Figure 7. Any pig outside a fence can threaten Ontario's native species and the agricultural industry by spreading disease, affecting habitats, and competing with native wildlife. Help protect Ontario's native species and keep your pigs safe by keeping them enclosed. Photos of pot bellied pigs and associated damage were contributed by residents, NDMNRF, and Jen Slack.