

Feral Pigs and Santa Cruz Island

✿ Non-native, feral animals have a short but destructive history on the Channel Islands.

Sheep were first introduced by ranchers in the early 1800's, and pigs were brought to Santa Cruz by the mid 1850's. Extremely destructive animals, the sheep have since been removed, but the pigs, which quickly went feral, still remain and are proliferating to record numbers. Prevalent across North America, pigs on Santa Cruz Island are now estimated to number more than 4,500 animals.

✿ These wild pigs are wreaking havoc on the island's native ecosystem.

Pigs rooting for bulbs, roots and bugs, often dig more than two feet into the ground. This destroys the island's fragile native plants, exposes bare soil to invasion from dominant and non-native weeds, such as fennel, and causes massive soil erosion that can take years to reverse. Already, pigs have destroyed three of only five remaining populations of the delicate Hoffman's Rockcress – a unique and fragile island wildflower.



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✿ Damage is so widespread that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has stated that the presence of pigs poses a major threat to all nine endangered plant species found on Santa Cruz Island, as well as the island fox.

The wild pigs are doing more than disturbing the land and inviting weed invasion. Their presence is also playing a major role in the decline of the island fox. The island's pig population has attracted golden eagles, newly established from the mainland. The pigs provide a stable and abundant food source to the eagles, which also prey upon the unsuspecting foxes. This eagle predation of the foxes is so intense that it could cause them to go extinct within as little time as a year.

✿ The destruction does not stop here; the pigs often expose, jumble and break historical artifacts when rooting for food.

Some of the richest, most abundant and pristine Native American sites in the country exist on Santa Cruz Island. Damage to these non-renewable, non-restorable sites is a direct and irreparable loss of Chumash cultural heritage and scientific information. Archeologists have discovered artifacts that date back over 10,000 years. Soil disturbance and the moving of artifacts (bowls, beads, human remains) by pig rooting clouds the information to be gained from these sites, often leaving it in such disarray that history cannot even be partially reconstructed.

✿ The Nature Conservancy and the National Park Service are proposing swift, aggressive management actions to eradicate the feral pig from Santa Cruz Island.

Although not easy, this has worked elsewhere with success, most notably on nearby Santa Rosa Island. If Santa Cruz Island's endangered plants and animals are to survive, there is no other option.