

Hunting on Santa Cruz Island

"In view of the undesirable traits possessed by these wild hogs, it is not surprising that much effort has been put forth in attempting their extermination. During the time of the Caires (1869-1937), they were speared, roped, knifed, shot, and trapped, but to little avail, for their numbers were never reduced to a degree where they were considered to be under control."

Earl Warren Jr., "The Agriculture of Santa Cruz Island"
University of California, Davis, Circa 1954

✿ The hunting of feral pigs has been a component of life on Santa Cruz Island since the 1850s. These animals were such a problem for island inhabitants, but so prized by hunting parties from the sport and fishing boats which anchored at Santa Cruz, that hunting permits were sold by the island company. Even the introduction of hog cholera was tried in an attempt to eliminate island pigs. All of these attempts failed.

The Question of Sport Hunting . . .

✿ Many have asked The Nature Conservancy, "Why not bring in sport hunters to eliminate the island's pig population? Wouldn't it be more economical and a great opportunity for sportsmen as well?" Both are good questions. But pigs' "boom and bust" reproductive rates far exceed the capacity of sport hunting programs to keep up. In fact, a single female can have multiple litters of up to 10 piglets per year. In favorable conditions, it is estimated that focused sport hunting is capable of reducing a population of feral pigs by 50%. Unfortunately, pig populations recover so quickly that experts have determined a minimum of 70% of the population must be removed in a single year, just to keep their population from immediately recovering to the previous level with the next breeding season. On Santa Cruz Island, hunting pigs is extremely difficult, due to poor access, steep slopes and heavy stands of fennel and chaparral. The bottom line: Sport hunting could temporarily reduce the numbers but it won't eradicate the pigs.

✿ However, sport hunting can still contribute to the eradication effort on Santa Cruz Island. Although the Park Service is forbidden to run sport hunting programs on public lands, The Nature Conservancy may do so as a private landowner. Recently, the Conservancy has been in close communication with the California Department of Fish and Game to provide an opportunity for sport hunting early in the eradication program.

✿ Following sport hunting, trained professionals using the most effective equipment and techniques, will allow us to efficiently and *safely* eradicate the pigs from Santa Cruz Island. Our plan is the result of extensive research and consultation with professionals and experts involved with eradication programs elsewhere. Most notable are the programs from Santa Catalina Island, where pigs are being eradicated with great success, and Santa Rosa Island, where pigs were successfully eradicated in the early 1990s.