



March 2010

British Wild Boar Organisation

www.britishwildboar.org.uk



‘Interesting happenings occurring with Britain’s free-living wild boar’

Dear All,

Welcome to March 2010’s newsletter, with updates on what has been happening with Britain’s wild boar populations. The main stories of interest concerning are captured below.



...skating away on the thin ice of a new day

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Wild boar group observed to avoid people walking their dogs

People walking dogs in woodland containing wild boar is always going to be an area of contention because violent fights between wild boar and domestic dogs can occur, but fortunately this is uncommon. The dog usually comes off second best, and there is the risk of the dog owner compromising their own personal safety by placing themselves between the wild boar and dog to protect the dog. It is sensible wildlife management to minimise these risks and ideally all dogs should be on a lead (especially those that do not come to heel or are not the most obedient) when walking or exercising in areas where there are wild boar. But in reality, this completely spoils the walk and just will not happen. In the Forest of Dean, Forestry Commission warning notices request dogs to be on a lead but these are frequently ignored, but if nothing else they raise awareness of this issue and show that the Commission is practising 'due diligence', which will prevent the Commission from being sued if things do go wrong. The more we learn about wild boar behaviour with regards to their interaction with people and dogs being walked, so much the better. To this aim we reproduce a fascinating email sent in by a chap bird-watching in the Forest of Dean who, from his high-vantage point, was able to witness such an interaction:



"I was at New Fancy View in the Forest of Dean to watch for Goshawks (bit of an annual trip for me). About 09:00 a.m. a fellow birder saw a wild boar in a clearing below the watch point. I was able to see 5 or maybe 6 animals feeding in the scrub over the next hour or so. The animals were of mixed age, some noticeably smaller than others but I don't believe I saw any full grown adult males. I have seen these in captivity and their striking size would I think have been apparent. I have seen various large mammal species in the wild (including elephant and brown bear) so it shouldn't have surprised me how easily the animals disappeared into the scrub but even from my high vantage point they were really hard to follow (and count).



There was an interesting interaction with people we were able to watch. A couple with two dogs walked along a forest road/track adjacent to the clearing with the boars in. At the time the group of boars had moved to with about 15m of the track. The dogs were ahead of their owners and seemed completely unaware of the boars. The boars too seemed either unaware or unconcerned by the dogs. When the people were adjacent to the boars, one which had become watchful and clearly aware of the people started to move away from the direction of the track quite quickly. The people stopped, clearly able to hear movement but I don't think able to see anything. They called their dogs to them but again the dogs seemed unable or uninterested to smell anything. The rest of the group of boars followed until they were maybe 40m from the track at which point they started feeding again. The boar continued to feed further from the track although over the next 15 minutes I lost sight of them as they moved out of the clearing. I think they changed their direction of travel because of the people but I would say they were watchful rather than concerned by them.”

People walking their dogs off the lead in wild boar areas is one thing, and it is ultimately a personal choice by the dog-owner who has hopefully weighed up the pros and cons of doing so. But when people are walking their dogs in wild boar areas *but don't know* there are wild boar in the area, then perhaps a management strategy rethink is in order. The following email we received exemplifies this fact, and not all dog-owners will be so fortunate to bump into such an enlightened chap (who is also a dog-owner himself).

“I spent yesterday late afternoon and evening looking for boar but didn't find any. I met two people walking their dogs off-lead who asked whether I'd seen any good birds. When I said I was looking for boar they were terrified at the prospect. I ended up spending about 15 minutes with each of them separately - by the time both parted their dogs were on leads, and they were positively looking forward to their first boar encounter.”

And to keep things in perspective, not all encounters between wild boar and dogs end up going badly - here is a wild boar in the Forest of Dean making friends with a Jack Russell. (Photo credit: David Slater <http://www.djsphotography.co.uk/>)





Perhaps we need always to remember that with all animals, whether domestic, farmed or wild, there is always an element of unpredictably, *and this is particularly relevant to wild boar.*

Managing the genetic purity of a wild boar population

Another contentious area for our wild boar concerns their genetic purity. The propensity of wild boar to readily mate with domestic pigs means that the genetic purity of the free-living wild boar will only go down should any of the resulting hybrid offspring escape at some point - and wild boar x domestic pig hybrid piglets often retain their father's aversion to captivity. But this statement assumes that the free-living wild boar are 'pure' in the first place, which in itself is difficult (if not impossible) to prove, especially when historical out-breeding with domestic pigs is considered. Hence the mantra of '*if it looks like a wild boar, acts like a wild boar, and fulfils the ecological niche of a wild boar, it is a wild boar*' is particularly useful when deciding on purity. However, this rule breaks down when wild boar with coat colours that vary from the norm are considered. Wild boar do exist in Britain that have a coat colour noticeably lighter than the wild type. It is uncertain if these pale animals have domestic-blood in them, or if they just have a natural mutation in their coat-colour genes which causes the lighter shade. We favour the mutation theory, because the animals breed true pale-coloured animals every time, through many generations, i.e. they do not produce piglets with any other variety of colours in their coats as would be expected if domestic pig genes were involved. However, we are happy to be corrected on this, if and when the genetics are unravelled.



'White' wild boar under anaesthetic after being caught, tagged, and released back into the wild.



This dilemma over purity was presented to a couple who have wild boar in their woodland, and who also manage the numbers by taking the odd one for the cooking pot. Here we reproduce extracts from of an email they kindly sent in, which exemplifies this purity issue:

“Following 3 months of study, after much debate, I finally decided to shoot at one. It was a tough decision as I had become quite attached to them all but it was a lighter coloured boar which I believe may have cross bred with a domestic pig. In the stealth camera images we have a sounder of 6 boar that come in and feed very regularly but we then started seeing a much lighter coloured boar sometimes on its own which we decided to take out of the gene pool. My friend and I skinned and butchered it and I have to be honest ate some of the nicest meat either of us had ever eaten not that it is a reason to go and shoot more but every part of it was used so I was pleased that it was honoured properly.

The farmer next door has commented on how much less, in fact, nil damage he has noticed on his fields since I started my feed stations in the wood. I guess responsible management is a good thing if it can keep an equilibrium with all interested parties, including the boar.”

This interesting situation will no doubt be further complicated one day by the appearance of a more common mutation in wild boar coat colours, that is often seen on the continent, occasionally on wild boar farms in the UK, but not to our knowledge free-living in the UK (to-date). Introducing the ‘Dalmatian’ wild boar!!

A dalmatian wild boar wowing on-lookers in Eastern Europe





Wild boar and agricultural damage



Wild boar mopping up grain at a bait station within the woodland. This technique is used on the continent to keep the wild boar in the woodland and away from the farmers' crops.

Also of interest in the previous email is the comment about the next door farmer's reduction in agricultural damage. Wild boar are notorious damagers of agricultural crops, and this is highlighted by an article we noticed reported in the Canadian press. Canada has free-living wild boar populations originating, like the wild boar in Britain, from escaped farm stock. However, unlike Britain, wild boar were never a native species in Canada and these escapees are proving a nuisance, so much so that farmers will now be compensated for their agricultural losses (see article below) – we wonder if compensation schemes will ever happen for farmers in Britain?

Farmers will receive compensation for livestock killed or injured by predators.

It's part of a \$2.5 million improvement to the Wildlife Damage Compensation Program. 100 per cent compensation will be provided for death caused by coyotes, wolves, foxes, bears, cougars, lynx and eagles. Animals injured by predators and treated by a veterinarian will be eligible for 80 per cent. The payouts will be determined on market values . . . with a minimum of \$400 for calves, \$40 for sheep and \$30 for goats.

In addition, wild boar damage to crops is being added this year . . . as well as wildlife damage to crops and feed used for swath, bale and corn grazing. The previous \$5200 per yard site compensation limit for feed damage caused by wildlife is being scrapped.

The announcement was made on the final day of the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities convention in Regina. SARM President David Marit says "wildlife damage to both crops and livestock has become an increasing concern for our members

http://www.saskatoonhomepage.ca/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=23966&Itemid=424



Wild boar and Schedule 9 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act

Staying on agricultural damage, in the last newsletter we wondered on the reasoning behind the government's decision to add wild boar, a former native species, to the list of non-native species that it is illegal to release into the wild (Schedule 9 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act). Releasing non-native animals willy-nilly into the wild is very bad practice, but to class the wild boar as a non-native species and a threat to indigenous animals was the interesting bit. However, light has been shone on the reasoning behind this decision – it is because of agricultural damage! We quote from the Defra document 'Impact Assessment of the Order to ban the sale of certain non-native species in England and Wales under section 14ZA of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981'

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-pets/wildlife/management/non-native/documents/sch9-ia-annex-b.pdf>

“Once native to Britain, this species [wild boar] became extinct in the wild in the 17th Century, but has now become re-established in small feral populations in some areas. The countryside has altered significantly since wild boar were last present in Britain. As such there is some uncertainty of the impacts this species could have on native biodiversity.

In 2008 Defra published *Feral wild boar in England: An action plan*, in which the Department undertook to consider the addition of wild boar to Schedule 9 to provide more effective controls on the release of this species into the wild. Some respondents to the consultation considered wild boar to be a former native species and, as such, they felt the species should not be added to the Schedule. However, because of the potential risk this species posed most respondents were of the view that release of this species should be restricted by its addition to Schedule 9.

Benefits of addition to Schedule 9: There will potentially be a reduction in the inappropriate release of wild boar and the prevention of associated negative impacts. A larger wild boar population will likely incur greater costs associated with the management of the species. For example the cost of providing effective fencing around agricultural crops to exclude wild boar has been estimated at more than £3 per metre, which alone is a considerable cost to farmers. The species has the potential to act as a vector of diseases which could have severe



negative impacts on agriculture. However, a risk assessment of the impacts of wild boar indicate that the risk of a disease outbreak occurring is low.”

So there it is. Wild boar **are** acknowledged to be a former native species, but one that is too much of a liability to agricultural interests, particularly because fencing is expensive. They are also a disease risk, but only slightly. Interestingly only *some* respondents considered the wild boar a former native species.

Wild boar and damage to recreational areas

We reproduce the following letter from a local paper circulated around the Forest of Dean.

"It is all very well so-called experts pronouncing on what we should do about the wild boar. Do they realise what damage they are doing? I belong to a walking group which walks in the Forest quite often. It has been obvious for some time along the edges of the paths that the boar have passed that way, but a couple of weeks ago near the site of Trafalgar Mine a large patch of bluebells had been dug up. There were a few bulbs lying around so presumably they had eaten the rest. We then came to Cannop Ponds picnic site which was absolutely ruined – about an acre of grass where families sit and play in the summer had been dug up (pictured). It is quite clear that if these animals are not eliminated eventually there will be no bluebells and no open areas of grass left intact."

M.L. Simmons, Chepstow. [Letter to the Forest and Wye District Review](#)



(photo of Cannop Ponds following restoration work reproduced with kind permission of Ben Locke)



It is true that wild boar can make a right mess of the bluebells, and of picnic areas, and begs the question: is this too high a price to pay for having the species back?

The author of the piece gets a little carried away with their conclusions about the extinction of bluebells and open areas of grassland, but it is a reminder that the visible presence of wild boar can be undeniably dramatic. There is a strong case for calling the ‘damage’ regeneration, but that is a story for another day...

**For those interested, there has been some preliminary independent research into the effect of wild boar rooting amongst bluebells in an East Sussex woodland (Sims N. (2005) The ecological impacts of wild boar rooting in East Sussex DPhil thesis, University of Sussex.). Feras for the future of the bluebells appear to be unfounded. The research can be accessed on this link:

<http://www.britishwildboar.org.uk/The%20ecological%20impacts%20of%20wild%20boar%20rooting%20in%20East%20Sussex.pdf>

And finally, an erratum

Thank you to the chap who pointed out our clanger regarding the article about wild boar in Ireland. The quote should have been ‘The Mountains of MOURNE stretch down to the Sea’, and not ‘The mountains of moorland...’. Our apologies to the 19th Century Irish musician Percy French, who penned the lines.

The end

As always, opinions and ideas most welcome. Please email comment@britishwildboar.org.uk
Do please circulate this newsletter to any other persons or parties who may also have an interest in the wild boar.

Kindest regards

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Primary objective of www.britishwildboar.org.uk: Raise public awareness, and stimulate interest and understanding about Britain's free-living wild boar populations, for the benefit of both man and beast.

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