

Key facts about feral pigs

What is a feral pig?

- A feral pig (*Sus scrofa*) is defined as an un-owned, free living pig that is descended from a domesticated pig.
- Pigs can become feral after escaping, being deliberate released, or being unrestrained.
- In Australia, the first official record of pigs was in Sydney after the arrival of the First Fleet.

How many feral pigs are there?

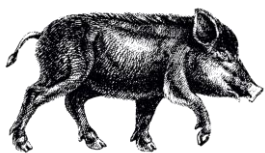
- Actual population numbers of feral pigs in Australia are not known.
- Their distribution in Australia is growing.
- In 2019, the feral population was estimated to be 3.2 million (95% confidence interval: 2.4 to 4.0 million), present at an average density of 1.03 pigs/km².
- Population distribution and abundance of feral pigs is being updated, with support from all states and territories.

Where do feral pigs live?

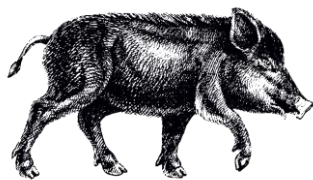
- Feral sows, piglets and younger animals live in sounder groups led by a matriarch.
- Sounder group size can vary with density, season and between different geographical areas.
- Younger males may live in smaller groups while older boars (>18 months old) are generally solitary.
- As feral pigs do not have sweat glands, water is a key requirement and is the key factor limiting the distribution and density of feral pigs in Australia.
- Feral pigs live close to water courses and floodplains, where there is increased available feed and vegetation cover.
- Preferred habitats include:
 - ❖ rainforests
 - ❖ monsoon forests
 - ❖ paperbark swamps
 - ❖ open floodplains
 - ❖ marsh areas
 - ❖ semi-arid floodplains
 - ❖ dry woodlands
 - ❖ sub-alpine grasslands

How big can feral pigs get?

- Mature liveweight of feral pigs can vary between different populations.



Average adult female
60-75 kg



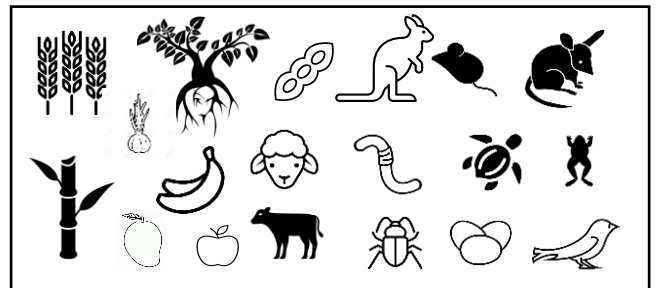
Average adult male
80-100kg

How often do feral pigs breed?

- Depending on the quality and availability of feed, breeding can occur throughout the year.
- Sows reach sexual maturity at around 25 kg, typically at around 6 months of age
- Two weaned litters can be produced every 12-15 months .
- Litter sizes can range from 4-10 piglets, with fertility of the sow increasing with liveweight and age.
- In ideal conditions, feral pig populations can increase by up to 86% in one year.

What do feral pigs eat?

- Feral pigs are omnivorous - this means that they eat a varied diet of both plant and animal matter.
- The composition of their diet will differ according to habitat, location and season.
- The consumption of animal protein varies between seasons and regions, but rarely exceeds 20% of their diet.



What's the average lifespan of a feral pig?

- Few feral pigs live for more than five years.
- The mortality of young piglets is generally high (100% when conditions are poor e.g. drought), particularly from starvation and loss of contact with their mothers.
- When food supply and seasonal conditions are favourable, piglet mortality can range from 10 – 15%.



Are feral pigs dangerous?

- Feral pigs can be aggressive.
- They have large tusks that can cause significant wounds to humans and other animals, including hunting dogs.
- Females can be particularly protective of their young when approached by humans and/or dogs.
- The greatest danger that feral pigs pose to is from the zoonotic diseases that they carry.

What impacts do feral pigs cause?

- Significant impacts are caused by feral pigs to Australia's environmental, agricultural, cultural and social assets.
- 148 species of threatened flora and fauna and 8 threatened ecological communities adversely threatened by feral pigs².
- Impacts include:
 - Crop and pasture destruction
 - Land and habitat degradation
 - Transmission of diseases, such as leptospirosis and brucellosis, to other animals and to humans
 - Spreading of weeds
 - Erosion and sediment run-off
 - Contamination of water
 - Damage to water sources
 - Damage to culturally important sites and cultural values
 - Competition for feed for livestock production and/or native wildlife
 - Predation of livestock
 - Damage to infrastructure (including fences, irrigation, drainage and bores).
 - Biodiversity loss
 - Native habitat degradation

How far do feral pigs move?

- Feral pigs are predominantly nocturnal.
- Feral pigs generally confine their movements to a defined home range.
- The average home range size of feral pigs in Australia is 9km². This can vary in response to the abundance of water, feed and shelter as well as population density and body size.
- Solitary, adult boars have a larger home range than adult females.

What diseases can they transmit?

- Feral pigs can transmit exotic, endemic and zoonotic diseases to other animals and humans.
 - Exotic diseases are those diseases that are not present in Australia
 - Endemic diseases are those that are characteristic of a population, region or environment.
- For Australia's livestock industries, the key exotic viral diseases include foot and mouth disease, African swine fever, classical swine fever, porcine reproductive and respiratory syndrome (PRRS), porcine epidemic diarrhoea virus and Aujeszky's disease.
- Leptospirosis, brucellosis, Japanese encephalitis virus, Q fever, melioidosis, erysipelas and sparganosis are some of the diseases of concern to livestock industries as well as to public health.
- Through their movement in the environment, feral pigs are implicated in the transmission of:
 - Panama disease tropical race 4 that affects bananas.
 - *Phytophthora cinnamomi*, which causes dieback in eucalypt forests, native plants and horticultural tree crops.

More information

- See the Resources section of our website: <http://feralpigs.com.au/resources/> to subscribe to our monthly newsletters and access factsheets, webinars and other information
- The [Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry](https://www.agriculture.gov.au/) - <https://www.agriculture.gov.au/> website
- Relevant State, territory and local government websites

¹Hone, J. (2019). How many feral pigs in Australia? An update. *Australian Journal of Zoology*, <https://doi.org/10.1071/ZO20077>

²Threat abatement plan for the predation, habitat degradation, competition and disease transmission by feral pigs (*Sus scrofa*). Commonwealth of Australia 2017.