



WILDLIFE NOTES

Javelina

Biologists have discovered many things about javelina (*Tayassu tajacu*) since the 1800s. Although early settlers thought javelina were pigs, biologists now believe the two are only distantly related. There are several recognizable differences. A javelina has 38 teeth; a pig has 44. The canine teeth of javelina are straight, though long, but those of a wild boar curve outward. A javelina has one dew claw per hind foot; a pig has two.

A javelina has a musky-smelling scent gland on its back near the rump, thus earning the nickname "musk hog." A true pig does not have this gland. A female javelina bears one to three young, but pigs average eight to 11. A javelina does not possess a gall bladder, but a pig does. A javelina is much smaller than a pig, weighing only 30 to 60 pounds. A European wild boar can weigh up to 400 pounds.

Javelina have a distinctive whitish collar and are also known as collared peccaries. The collar on adults, approximately 3/4 of an inch wide, begins about nine inches behind the base of the skull. The collar runs from the top of the shoulders to the brisket. Although young are born reddish in color, adults appear salt-and-pepper gray, and their hair is coarse.

Javelina are found in greatest abundance in the Republic of Mexico. However, populations also exist in Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas. New Mexico javelina are found in greatest abundance in the extreme southwestern part of the state (referred to as the bootheel country). Biologists believe that javelina have expanded their range in this century, as scattered herds can be seen in Catron, Dona Ana, Sierra, and Socorro counties.

Javelina occupy a variety of habitats. They are typically desert dwellers but can also be found in chaparral, oak woodlands and even the fringes of pine forests.

Breeding occurs throughout the year; the peak appears to be in the winter and spring. Females may have several mates, and no definite male-female bonds exist. Yet dominant males have greater success in mating due to their aggressive nature. Gestation averages 145 days, and births can occur any month of the year. Newborns weigh about one pound at birth and average 30-40 pounds at 12 months of age. Biologists have found that the greatest number of young are

born before the Southwest's so-called monsoon season of July and August.

Females generally give birth in "bed grounds." One or two javelinas will remain with the birthing female even if the rest of the herd leaves to feed. Newborns can travel with the herd within a few hours. Since females have a very limited capacity for milk storage, newborns must nurse frequently (and they often squeal when attempting to do so). In the wild, nursing ceases after 16 to 24 weeks.

Captive javelina can live 18 to 20 years, but research shows that most individuals in the wild die before they are 13 years old. Herds of six to 20 individuals are common, but a herd of 30 or more is a rarity.



Javelinas have poor eyesight, but their hearing and sense of smell are keen. A person can walk into a feeding herd of javelinas unseen. If that person kicks a rock, snaps a twig, or has the wind to his back, however, the herd may scatter for a distance of 100 yards or more.

The scent gland on a javelina's back helps to make the herd cohesive. Reciprocal rubbing occurs when two animals stand together, facing opposite directions, each rubbing its head to the other's back and scent gland. This allows herd members to share each other's scents and makes it possible to recognize members from a different herd.

Javelina also use their scent to mark territorial boundaries. They rub secretion from the scent gland onto rocks, shrubs, and trees. Bed grounds, feeding areas, and watering holes are usually marked.

When herds encounter one another at overlap areas, individuals will display aggressive behavior. They will chase an intruder at full speed, with jaws or teeth clacking and the animal woofing loudly. The chase can cover 50 to 75 yards. Although most boundary disputes leave the animals unharmed, injury can occur.

Javelinas are primarily herbivores (vegetarians), but they will occasionally eat insects and animal matter. Succulent plants, especially cacti, comprise a large

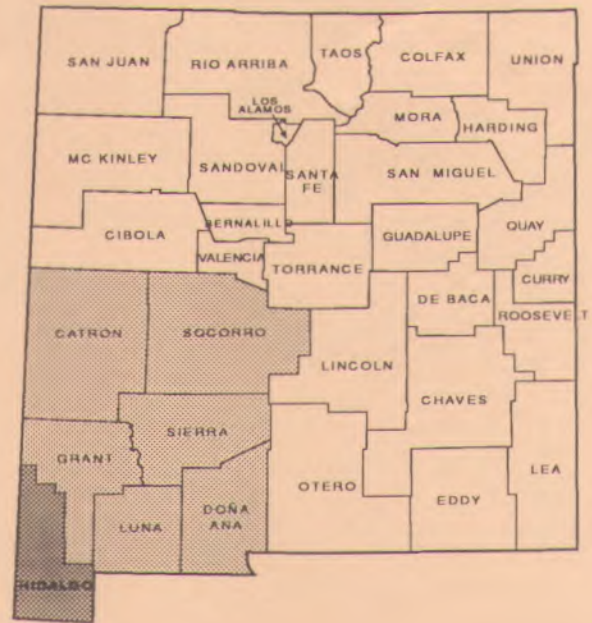
part of their diet. Most researchers agree that prickly pear cactus is their main staple when other forage plants are not available. Javelinas will readily consume cholla and hedgehog cactus, bulbs, rhizomes, roots, tubers, acorns, manzanita berries, pine nuts, grasses, mesquite beans, catclaw, and juniper. The animals usually leave saucer-shaped excavations where they root out tubers or bulbs.

Javelinas are prey to black bears, mountain lions, bobcats, and coyotes. Golden eagles have been known to swoop down and grab a newborn javelina in their talons.

Sport hunting of javelina was not allowed in New Mexico until 1963.

Recently, there has been concern about the numbers of javelina in New Mexico. In 1989 and 1990 a wildlife conservation officer documented a drastic decline in local javelina numbers as eight wild javelina were observed that were either sick or dead.

Four years ago in neighboring Arizona, a disease outbreak similar to canine distemper occurred in javelina populations. The sick javelinas had lesions on the brain and exhibited a dancing,



■ Regular Occurrence
 ■ Less Regular Occurrence

foot-tapping gait along with photophobia (avoidance of light). Apparently drought may be a trigger mechanism that stresses wildlife enough to make animals susceptible to disease or malnutrition. In New Mexico biologists have debated whether these same factors caused the decline in our javelina population. The answer is unknown.

It is believed that the javelina population is recovering. It could take several years, however, before it reaches 1989 levels.

In addition to providing hunting opportunities that correspond with the animal's population levels, the Department of Game and Fish will continue to monitor javelinas. Disease, poor weather such as severe snowstorms, and habitat degradation can negatively affect New Mexico's javelinas.

Anyone can go afield and watch javelina. Javelinas should be considered great "watchable wildlife" species.

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