


Pigs Rooting in Europe!

Dr. James B Beard

A major problem on North American turfs, particularly those near ponds and lakes, is excessive populations of Canada geese, which destroy turfgrasses and leave large areas covered with slimy excrement. A distinctly different problem has been on the increase in Europe for some time.

Specifically, it involves the destructive rooting damage of wild pigs (Suidae family) on turfgrass areas. In earlier years many of the natural habitats for wild pigs were areas where families with low incomes tended to live. Thus, hunting for pigs was an inexpensive source of meat. The killing of wild pigs became so intense that many countries enacted laws to protect what was considered an endangered species at the time. Now times have changed. Economies in many of these regions have improved such that hunting wild pigs as a source of meat has greatly declined. Subsequently, the wild pig population has exploded without this hunting pressure. While there are now large populations of wild pigs, the protectionist laws are still in place. Consequently, the wild pigs are moving out of their normal habitat onto turfgrass areas.

The problem extends from southern Europe up through Berlin, Germany. The use of irritants and similar approaches have not been successful in preventing turf damage by the nocturnal rooting of wild pigs. A single night's activity with a group of wild pigs can result in acres of fairway turf being destroyed. At least one golf course was actually closed to play due to destruction of the playing surfaces by wild pigs. The only approach that has proven effective in preventing turf damage by wild pigs has been the very costly installation of a perimeter chain-link fence. It appears that the problem may continue to increase on golf courses in Europe, particularly during dry summers when the population of wild pigs exceeds the ability of the adjacent natural habitat area to support these animals. Thus they tend to move onto the irrigated turfs of golf courses, sport fields, lawns, and gardens. 

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Email: turfax@aol.com

EDITOR

Dr. James B Beard
International Sports Turf Institute Inc.
1812 Shadowood
College Station, TX 77840

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Dr. Peter H. Dernoeden
Department of Natural Resource
Sciences and Landscape
Architecture
University of Maryland
College Park, MD 20742

Dr. Daniel A. Potter
Department of Entomology
S-225 Agriculture Science Center, N
University of Kentucky
Lexington, KY 40546

Dr. Fred Yelverton
Department of Crop Science
Box 7620
North Carolina State University
Raleigh, NC 27695

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