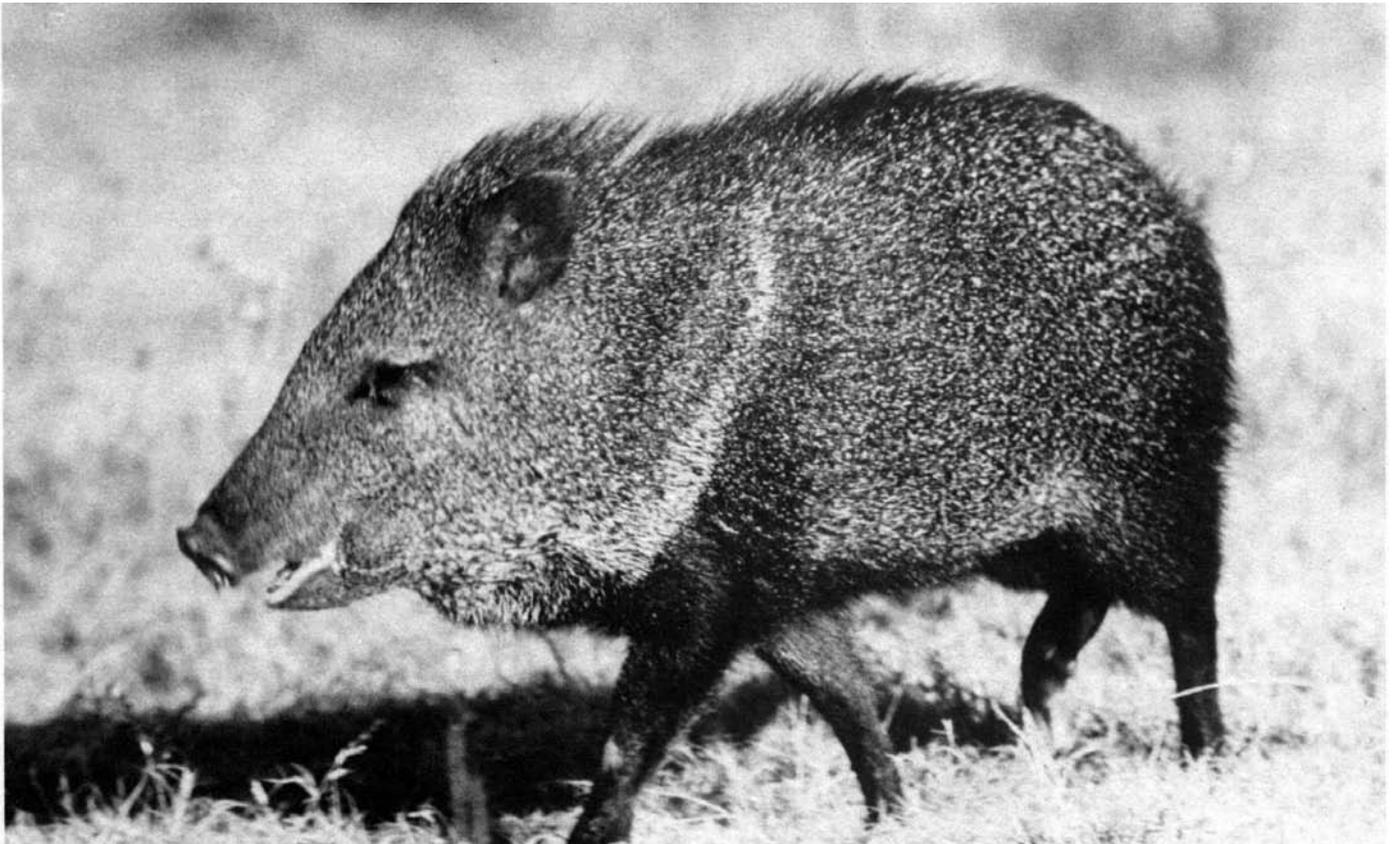


# Learn About Javelina

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The javelina, or collared peccary, has always been placed in the shadow of the white-tailed deer by Texas hunters, but in recent years interest in this much ignored game animal has greatly increased.

Biologists with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department have conducted several studies to obtain information needed to manage this species, but there is still much to be learned. The answers to the following commonly asked questions were obtained from studies conducted with marked javelina herds in South Texas.

## Is the javelina really a pig?

Although students of scientific classification do not agree on the scientific name for this animal-it is currently known as either *Tayassu tajacu* or *Dicotyles tajacu*-they are certain it doesn't belong in the same family as domestic hogs and wild boars. Such features as having only one dew claw on the hind foot and four teats, with only two being functional, exclude the javelina from the swine family.

## How long do javelina live?

This is a question we can presently answer only with an educated guess. Some of the animals originally marked for movement studies in 1965 were observed 9 years later. The educated guess would be that a javelina's life expectancy in the wild is about 10 years.

## What do they eat?

Like their swine relatives, javelinas are omnivorous, meaning they eat almost anything available. Nevertheless, studies in Texas and Arizona have proven the importance of prickly pear cactus to the javelina. On almost all ranges, this succulent plant provides more than half of its diet while fulfilling most of its water requirements. This thorny diet, low in nutrients, is supplemented by green forbs, vines and grasses. Aside from scooting a prickly pear leaf along the ground to break some of the longer thorns, the javelina pays little attention to the numerous spines on its favorite snack.

### **Will supplemental feeding help?**

As with any wild animal, supplemental feeding can be detrimental to javelina. If such feeding is done during periods of stress, usually occurring during droughts or after severe winter weather, it will improve the chances of survival and reproduction in a javelina herd. But this only foils nature's attempts to limit the number of wild animals to the carrying capacity of the habitat. Supplemental feeding can increase this capacity if other life requirements such as cover are adequate, but if supplemental feeding is ever terminated, the range is left with more animals than it can support.

### **What can I do to increase the number of javelina on my land?**

Javelina need food and dense brush for cover. Increase either or both and you increase the capacity for that range to support javelina. The densest javelina populations are invariably found where prickly pear is abundant, so an increase in this cactus would be a prerequisite to any increase in javelina. However, most ranchers are not that fond of prickly pear. Although it has carried many a cow through a dry winter, prickly pear is still considered an invader on improved ranges. Javelina are also dependent on thick brush which they use as cover during the hot summer days. Whitebrush or bee brush thickets are favored in South Texas, but many times javelina use dense stands of blackbrush. In the Hill Country, cedar brakes offer protection. The requirements for javelina are in conflict with many of the principals of range improvements being advocated and, if you really want javelina, you must take their habitat needs into consideration when any "improvements" are planned.

### **Are javelina harmful to the range?**

Javelina do have some habits that might be considered harmful to some range improvement programs. To some extent, the animals spread the growth of prickly pear during their feeding activities, and a herd will muddy stock water during hot summer months when they use stock tanks as wallows. However, javelina probably do more to control prickly pear than many methods used by man because of the tremendous importance of this cactus in their diet. Javelina compete very little with cattle and, since these animals can be valuable assets because of the increased number of hunters wanting to pursue them, they are seldom thought of as being harmful.

### **Why don't I have any javelina on my land? I did four years ago.**

Brush clearing has decreased javelina range in Texas more than any other factor. Heavy hunting pressure could

also cause javelina to disappear, but only in a few areas are javelina vulnerable to extensive hunting. As long as food, cover and protection from overhunting are provided, javelina should remain in the area.

### **Do I need brood stock trapped and put onto my land, or will javelina find my ranch?**

If you do not have javelina on your ranch now, there is little likelihood of the animals showing up someday. In South Texas javelina seldom move over one mile. Movements greater than this are made only by solitary boars. Before asking the Parks and Wildlife Department for brood stock, you should first determine if your ranch has suitable javelina habitat. The wildlife biologist in your area will be glad to assist you in this evaluation. And too, there must be enough land, about 5,000 acres, pledged to the protection of this brood stock for the department to consider restocking javelina on the area. Since there is often a difference of opinion on the merits of javelina, a public hearing is always held to insure public acceptance of javelina prior to release.

### **Are javelina really dangerous?**

The javelina, although weighing only about 55 pounds, does have the capability of committing aggravated assault on a human being. Its canine teeth are very well developed for cutting and slashing. However, the javelina is not aggressive and will almost always retreat from a person unless cornered. Most stories of charging javelina stem from the habit of javelina, which are extremely nearsighted, scattering in all directions when an alarm is sounded by one of the herd. With 20 javelina going in all directions, at least one is bound to be headed for the intruder, and even the bravest of souls is certain the beast is out to do him bodily harm. The herd will then mill around for a time making "whoof whoof" sounds and occasionally popping their teeth, which is not unlike the sound made by hitting two large bones together at the rate of four times a second. They will stay in the area until the cause of the alarm is found, often making the intruder, who sought safety aloft, feel "treed."

The javelina can be dangerous when hunted with dogs. Probably due to its hatred of the coyote which preys on its young, javelina are very aggressive around any dog, as many quail hunters in the brush country can testify. The two-inch canines of the javelina have caused many a hound man to cut short his hunt for a trip to the veterinarian to have his dog sewed up. And, in the case of the javelina hunter, it is not rare for stitches to be required in his hide, for when cornered the javelina makes no distinction between dogs and hunters. \*\*

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