LAMORINDA WEEKLY



**Published September 3, 2008**

# Herds of Wild Pigs Cause Destruction in Sanders Ranch

*By Jennifer Wake*

2 pigs caught Photos provided by Alecia Larson

It's not uncommon to hear the sounds of local wildlife emitting from the hills surrounding Lamorinda, but recently Moraga residents Alecia and Spencer Larson have woken to the grunt/squeal of wild pigs using her backyard lawn as a feeding ground. "We are accustomed to many known and some unknown critter noises in this area of Moraga - especially at night - but we are not yet accustomed to wild pig noises," Larson says. Early last month, Larson saw three big pigs in her backyard "having a field day tearing up every piece of sod they could uncover, apparently looking for grubs." Three days later, eight younger and much smaller pigs ran up from behind their house and into the yard next door - the same pack of pigs she had seen two weeks earlier. For the past few months, Larson and other neighbors' yards in Sanders Ranch have been a target for the wild pigs, some of which can weigh up to 300 pounds. "I would have to say that the most difficult aspect has been looking out onto our destroyed back yard and not knowing when the problem will be solved," Larson says. "The most surprising thing about the experience is seeing how bold they are! At first they did their dirty work at night, but now we had recent sightings at 10 a.m. and 8 p.m., when it was light out." Although not common in Lamorinda neighborhoods, Fish and Game Warden Nicole Kozicki issued a pig depredation permit for several homeowners in Sanders Ranch. They are now working with a trapper from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. "Pigs have been around Sanders Ranch for several years now, although I believe this is the most damage I have seen," Kozicki says. She is not aware of any pig problems in Lafayette or Orinda neighborhoods. Associate Wildlife Biologist for the Department of Fish and Game, John Krause, says the recent drought conditions

may be contributing to the problem. "It is possible that the pigs are coming into neighborhoods since those areas will have more forage/water sources available than drier open space lands," he says. "Their behavior is likely due to normal foraging preferences." According to the California Department of Fish and Game, today's local wild pig is actually a "wild boar/feral pig hybrid" that use their snouts to root up the ground in search of food, including roots, fungus and other items. The total damage caused by feral swine in the United States is estimated to be approximately $800 million annually. In 1999, more than four million feral pigs were thought to roam the United States, with the majority in California and Texas. Unfortunately, once wild pigs have found a good food source, they are not likely to leave. Large traps were set in Larson's and other neighbors' backyards to catch the pigs with bait. Four pigs have been caught in the past several weeks in Larson's trap alone. Much like wild pigs that are hunted in more remote areas to reduce their numbers, once pigs are trapped, the animals are destroyed and given to local tradesmen to butcher for food. "There are a couple of groups of them," Larson says. "I saw four a couple of weeks ago in my back yard and four yesterday. They put a trap in the back and one was caught last week." Since not all the pigs have been caught and they continue to return, the Larsons and other neighbors have not repaired the lawns that were damaged. "We are leaving it as is until the pigs are gone," Larson says. "At first we were getting it fixed, but to no avail. The pigs would come back and literally, within hours turn the sod over again. I have no idea about the cost of repairing our yard." Kozicki recommends that homeowners use fertilizer that kills grubs and worms in the lawn, and Larson was told to put up motion detector lights, and add mesh fencing around their yard where tangled legs might discourage them. Unfortunately, they are only temporary fixes. "They may keep the pigs out of your yard, but drive them into your neighbors," she says. "It's not eliminating the problem."

Feral pigs dig up pristine lawns in search of grubs in Sanders Ranch

Reach the reporter at: jennifer@lamorindaweekly.com



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