

Bonaire Launches Feral Pig Control Programme

The aim of this project is to control feral pig populations on Bonaire, thereby improving conditions for reforestation, reducing impacts on native dry-forest habitat and minimizing damage to fences and property. Activities will focus on raising awareness about the impact of feral pigs, reducing feral pig populations and monitoring project effectiveness. It is hoped that early intervention will ensure the feral pig population and the associated problems do not escalate beyond their current state and become unmanageable.

A team from Echo Foundation, a local non-profit which focuses on parrot protection and reforestation, has been evaluating the impact of feral pigs on local flora since 2016, monitoring pig activity and removing pigs from the wild. With funding from the Netherlands' Ministry of Economic Affairs through the Nature Fund, staff at Echo Foundation are launching a public campaign and calling for assistance to locate and control feral pig numbers. They have set up a Pig Hotline to report pig sightings and are collecting data on pig numbers, size and colouration. Pigs removed from the wild will be slaughtered and the meat offered for sale and given as prizes in pig meat raffles.

Pigs, along with goats and donkeys, were first brought to Bonaire by the Spanish in the 1500s. Whilst pigs are not exactly new comers to the island, feral pig populations have only become established on Bonaire in the last decade. Escaped domestic pigs become feral in just two generations. Unlike goats and donkeys, where measures to control populations have little public support, feral

pigs are not highly valued by the local community and can cause considerable damage to property by burrowing through fences to access food sources such as gardens and fields.

Pigs have a high reproductive rate, producing up to 8 piglets a year and reach sexual maturity early, which coupled with a lack of natural predators, means that feral populations can increase extremely rapidly. Under optimal conditions populations can grow by 500% in just 12 to 15 months. Systematic surveys have yet to be carried out, but sightings indicate that there are currently between 500 and 1000 feral pigs on Bonaire. Adult boars on Bonaire are known to reach 60kg and can have 8cm long tusks.

Feral pigs have a high negative impact on native vegetation, damaging roots and preventing the regeneration of trees (Campbell & Long, 2009). They are generalists and can be found throughout a range of habitats. Signs of feral pig activity include ground that is heavily disturbed and trampled, plants which have been dug up and/or have had their roots exposed (Friebel & Jodice, 2009). Feral pigs are susceptible to high temperatures and highly dependent on water. They are found in high densities around shady areas with water.

Although this is not the case in Rincon, pigs in the wild tend to be cautious and avoid human contact, which can make them difficult to track and catch. Efforts to trap feral pigs, need to be immediately successful as the pigs quickly learn to avoid the traps.



Echo is a non-profit organisation focused on the conservation of the Yellow-shouldered Amazon parrot (*Amazona barbadensis*) and the dry-forest ecosystems of Bonaire.

One of their objectives is to restore ecosystems on Bonaire through creative conservation and inspire an appreciation of nature through stimulating sustainable use. Echo aims to fulfil this mission through research and monitoring, conservation management and outreach education.

Website: <http://www.echobonaire.org>



Pigs in Rincon, Bonaire.
Photo credit: Echo

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