

## **Bullets & Boars**



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An investigation into the relationship between humans and boars

Wild boars were once common in England, but they were hunted to extinction by the end of the thirteenth century. The species was destroyed when King Henry III ordered the remaining three hundred boars hunted down, slaughtered, and served to his guests at a feast. There was a brief attempt, in the 17th century, by both King James I and King Charles I to reintroduce them for recreational hunting. This reintroduction failed because the population was overhunted before it could fully be established.

In the 1990s, consumers started favouring imported boar meat, so farms began to develop in England aimed specifically at harvesting boar. The boars were relentless in their escape attempts, and by 1998, it was announced that two populations of wild boar had returned to England, with a third forming in the Forest of Dean.

In the Medieval period across Europe, hunting boar was reserved for those of noble birth, who sought to prove themselves as fierce hunters or talented trackers. Hunting parties consisted of men, all on horseback, this is depicted below by an unknown artist in the 19th century. Large hunting hounds would corner the boar, and the hunter would dismount from his horse and finish the kill off with a spear or sword. Using a dagger was considered a special test of bravery. Since then, hunting boar has significantly decreased. It is still seen (particularly in the United States), but it is more a means of managing the ever-growing population than a test of skill.



A WILD BOAR HUNT IN OLDEN TIME



Boars are destructive; they create deep rootings in the ground, often four to seven centimetres deep, when they are scavenging for food. While rooting, nothing can stand in their way, so fences and walking trails are often destroyed in the boar's wake. This can be particularly harmful to farmers. Merritt Fracassa (depicted on the left) is a farmer and boar hunter based in the United States and advocates for the removal of wild boar.

*"Their destructiveness impacts our livelihood of farming; it's a real problem down here, and farmers lose money every year due to the loss of crops from the boar. I'm in full support of hunting and culling them, and I do it all the time with thermal hunting and trapping gear. We'll walk three miles a night looking for them. We go to a lot of farmland looking to take out every boar possible."*

Boars are a Keystone species. Their rootings mix up soil layers and break up dense vegetation, allowing for more plant growth, microhabitats, and exposes additional food sources, their wallows serve as drinking spots for more animals and even their droppings are seen to help disperse a fungal spore that is beneficial to tree health.

*"There are many ecological reasons to welcome wild boar. I always enjoy seeing them and have seen lots of scientific evidence of the benefits of their activities, but as with most things, too much wild boar disturbance can have some negative effects,"*

says Jim Swanson, an ecologist based in the Forest of Dean. I interviewed a couple who live just outside the Forest of Dean in Cinderford, England. The Dowding couple, Charles and Alice Dowding, have lived in Cinderford for forty years and often interact with Boar. When I asked how it is to live alongside the Boar, they said;

*"Living alongside the boar doesn't really impact us in a negative way, except that we have to protect our gardens and lawns from them. It's a bit harder for farmers, but they are allowed to shoot the boar. They need to be culled because they breed at least three times a year, and the population needs to be kept under control. When they are hungry and can't find food, they enter the town and knock over the bins and eat any waste food, which can be quite messy."*



**"In the Forest of Dean it can be quite a taboo subject. Opinions tend to sit at two extremes: some people want the boar completely removed, while others don't want them touched at all."**





I interviewed a source based in the Forest of Dean, who manages the wild boar population there for a private estate. He has requested that his identity remain confidential.

*“I manage wild boar on a private estate in the Forest of Dean as part of a wildlife and habitat management plan. Wild boar are a valuable part of the ecosystem, but like any species, their populations need to be monitored and managed to maintain a healthy balance across the estate. My role is focused on maintaining that balance. The management of boar isn’t just about population control its part of a broader strategy to keep the environment on the estate sustainable and functioning well for all species that rely on it. That said, in the Forest of Dean, it can be quite a taboo subject. Opinions tend to sit at two extremes: some people want the boar completely removed, while others don’t want them touched at all. In reality, the answer lies somewhere in the middle. Boars should be recognised as an asset to the area and to the habitats they help shape. But at the same time, careful, professional management is essential. Without it, their numbers can rise quickly and begin to cause significant environmental and public impacts. Responsible culling helps prevent these issues while ensuring the boar that remain are healthy and living in good habitat conditions. Another important aspect is the utilisation of the carcasses. When harvested correctly, wild boar provide a beautiful, high-quality source of food, whether for personal consumption or for the wider food chain. Making full use of the animal is an essential part of ethical wildlife management and supports the field-to-fork ethic. For me, this is an essential part of responsible species management, showing respect for the animal through ethical shot placement, keeping disturbance to an absolute minimum, utilising the carcass fully, and making decisions grounded in ecological evidence.”*