

PAT O'BRIEN



Javelina Junting

By JIM HEFFELFINGER
Game Specialist, Region V

G&F File Photo

When feeding, javelina concentrate heavily on succulents such as prickly pear, hedgehog, barrel cactus, cholla, and lechuguilla.

Javelina have always drawn a certain amount of curiosity from newcomers to the state. The journals of early explorers in the mid-1800s are sparsely sprinkled with reports of "Mexican hogs" along the rivers and lowland valleys in southeastern Arizona. Several place names, such as Musk Hog Mountain in Unit 32, record their presence around the turn of the century; however, javelina themselves are also relative newcomers to the state. Archeological remains prior to 1700 show no evidence of javelina in Arizona. The javelina is thought to have evolved in the thick thorn scrub of subtropical South America. Its distribution has spread and increased from a scattered presence in low river valleys of southeastern Arizona northward to invade the ponderosa pine forests near Williams, west of Flagstaff.

We also know the javelina as the **collared peccary**, named for the white

band or collar which runs across its shoulders. Contrary to myth, javelina do not belong to the rodent family, nor are they members of the pig family. They have unique characteristics placing them in a separate family with two other species of peccary, the white-lipped and the Chacoan.

Although much maligned for their lack of intelligence, javelina are no less intelligent than our other native wildlife. They simply evolved a special combination of attributes to survive in their environment. Their eyesight is very poor at distances greater than 75 yards, an understandable characteristic for animals that evolved in thick thorn scrub where food, water, shelter, and predators could only be seen at short distances (which was unfortunate in the case of predators). The javelina "attacks" that we sometimes hear about are probably just animals trying to get away, but with their poor eyesight, they don't know which direction that is.

Their sense of smell and hearing abilities, however, are well developed.

Javelina travel about in large groups, or herds. These herds occupy a territory of about 1 to 2 square miles, which is defended from other adjacent herds. In good javelina habitat, each territorial boundary abuts the boundary of adjacent herds. This tendency makes it somewhat difficult to answer the question "Where are the javelina in this area?" They are everywhere.

The number of javelina per herd averages from eight to 12 throughout the state. Herds numbering 40 or more are reported annually, but Department researcher Gerald Day counted 500 herds during his 25 years of javelina research and saw only six with more than 30 javelina and none over 40.

Javelina spend their time resting and feeding. Resting occurs primarily in traditional bedgrounds located in low areas of thick brush or in caves throughout their territory. Bedgrounds offer soft soil to lay on and protection from predators and the weather.

When feeding, javelina concentrate heavily on succulents such as prickly pear, hedgehog, barrel cactus, cholla, and lechuguilla. The fruits and fleshy parts provide not only nutritious food

but water as well. When javelina feed on prickly pear, they grasp the pad and pull, shredding the pad and leaving the stringy interior fibers visible. Small cacti such as hedgehogs are knocked over with a front hoof and the insides eaten out so that only the tough outer skin and spines remain. Javelina pull apart and scatter lechuguilla leaves as they eat the fleshy heart out of the plant. Occasionally they will dig or root-up roots and tubers.

Although javelina are "everywhere," they never seem to be where you are (even when you've seemingly been everywhere). Knowing how javelina feed and what signs they leave behind produce successful javelina hunting. After selecting the area you want to hunt, you should direct your first scouting trip to the local map store for a topographic map or two. Find an area that is more than one mile from any road and in good javelina habitat. When scouting, walk into that area and look for evidence of recent javelina activity. Besides looking for shredded prickly pear, scooped-out hedgehog cacti, and scattered lechuguilla leaves, search for bedgrounds, droppings, tracks, and rooting activity. You should also look for good glassing locations and

trails that will lead you through some good-looking habitat with minimal disturbance.

One of the most important pieces of hunting equipment is a pair of binoculars. The price of your binoculars is less important than the fact that you are using a pair. The expensive ones are better; they are clearer, more durable, and reduce glare and eye strain. If you can pick up a pair of Zeiss 15x60s for over \$1,000 that's great, but most of us can't afford that kind of glassware because we're too busy buying other frivolous things—like groceries.

You should spend most of your hunting time searching for javelina with your binoculars. Find a good glassing point where you can see a large canyon or basin, and then systematically search the whole area within view. The best way to search the area completely is to mount your binoculars on a tripod. The tripod offers several advantages. Your field of view is completely still, allowing you to see that subtle movement of a javelina taking a step against the stationary background. The tripod also allows for a systematic search of the area within view. Start at the top of the hill or ridge and scan across at the same level until you see all of the hilltop.

Then adjust your binoculars down one level and scan back across the hill. Continue to search in overlapping layers until you have covered the whole hill, top to bottom.

If you are looking at a large basin or canyon, by the time you're done searching the area it's time to look again. It's common to find animals in the middle of a hillside that you have just searched. Contrary to the opinion of some physicists, javelina do have the power to materialize out of nowhere.

Plan to glass the sunny slopes in the morning and evening. These animals of subtropical origin prefer the warmer slopes in the winter months, and it's much easier to see them there. On rainy or windy days, look for them in low, protected areas out of the weather. Remember to concentrate on areas close to bedgrounds and near the bottom of the canyons.

Always carry a predator call with you when javelina hunting. The herd serves as a defensive unit, protecting the juveniles in the herd from predators. A predator call simulates the squealing of a red piglet and sometimes draws javelina out to face the source of the disturbance.

Some people think javelina meat tastes less than palatable, and some have even gone so far as to suggest this as the reason we find no evidence of javelina in pre-1700 archeological sites (during what paleontologists call the *Precrockpot Period*). If properly cared for in the field, javelina provide good eating. The key is to field dress the animal immediately and skin it at your first opportunity. Don't worry about the scent gland; it is attached to the skin and will come off when you skin the animal. The scent clings to the hairs of the javelina, so make sure you do not touch the meat with the hand you use to hold the hide.

Javelina hunting is an excellent opportunity to get out into the mountains to sharpen your skills and scout for next year's deer-hunting areas. If you haven't bought maps for your hunt area yet, go to the map store now, and if you decide to buy a tripod this year, you'd better get a crockpot, too. 🦌



BOB MILES

You should spend most of your time searching for javelina with your binoculars. Find a good glassing area where you can see a large canyon or basin.