

BOOK REVIEW

WILD PIGS: ENVIRONMENTAL PEST OR ECONOMIC RESOURCE?

by *C.A. Tisdell*

(Pergamon: Sydney 1982)

This book arises from a five year study of wild pigs. Whilst the emphasis is on Australia, there is a considerable amount of material on pigs in other countries. The study appears to have been conducted by talking to people, writing to people, and reading what other people have written. As such the book lacks that intangible sense of involvement and enthusiasm which might have come had it been written by someone with a first hand interest in the animals.

The book does give the reader a general picture of the distribution of wild pigs (native and feral), and an insight into attitudes towards pigs worldwide. The wild pig in Europe, where it is referred to as 'boar', generally is highly regarded for sporting purposes and is conserved and managed for hunting. By contrast, in moslem Pakistan the pig is seen as having no redeeming qualities and is dealt with by various means including the periodic release of swine fever. The attitude in Australia is basically anti-pig, however substantial numbers of people hunt them for sport, deriving justification for doing so from the pest status of the animal.

The book deals with pigs as a pest (agricultural and pastoral, forestry, national parks, native wildlife), pigs as a health and disease risk, recreational hunting of pigs, commercial use of wild pigs, and methods and economics of control of pigs. The biology and habits of wild pigs are dealt with only briefly (three pages).

The sections on distribution of pigs (worldwide), and on control of pigs, I found interesting and readable. Some of the other sections I found heavier going, and the economic material – including graphs, equations and models – I would sooner have read somewhere else (I am myself an economist).

The organization of references I found annoying also. References are listed by chapter at the end of the book. With forty pages of references (582 of them), it was very easy to end up in the wrong chapter. I would have preferred the references at the end of each chapter, perhaps with some of them as footnotes and some of them scrapped altogether.

There were a few typographical errors in the text, and a few misguided or inconsistent references to places and things. For example, turkey's nest dams are referred to as turkey dams (p.35); 'blady grass' (p.38) becomes 'cutty grass' (p.41); Curragundi, near Moree, N.S.W. is misspelt 'Curringindi' (p.89); the Big Warrambool near Angledool, N.S.W. has been promoted to 'The Warambool (sic) River' (p.106); and lignum (the common usage both in the text and in the countryside) becomes 'lignum scrub' (p.136).

I must comment also on the photographs. There are 57 of them printed within the text. Their reproduction and perhaps the original photographs themselves, are less than satisfactory. Two (figs. 2.1 and 2.2) are quite incomprehensible, and a number of others have obviously lost much of the detail they must once have had. Also, there is no index of photographs (or graphs).

I have had a long term interest in wild pigs, an interest which includes studying them and hunting them, both in an amateur capacity. With this background, I was looking forward to reading what I hoped would be the first comprehensive study of wild pigs in this country. My impression upon reading Professor Tisdell's book however is that it reads more like a thesis than a book. The book contains some good material, but there is also material we could probably do without – or do with but in condensed form. If the book survives its first edition and is tidied up, condensed, livened up, and fixed up with some clearer photographs, it may yet come good as a second edition.

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