

TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEWEE: Rick Taylor

INTERVIEWER: David Todd

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Google Voice [00:00:00] This call is now being recorded.

David Todd [00:00:04] Good morning. This is David Todd.

Rick Taylor [00:00:07] Hey, David, Rick Taylor. How are you this morning?

David Todd [00:00:09] I'm fine. I'm fine.

Rick Taylor [00:00:11] Did you get your car fixed?

David Todd [00:00:13] Thanks for your patience.

Rick Taylor [00:00:14] What was wrong?

David Todd [00:00:14] I did. It was just a dead battery. So it wasn't as big a deal as I worried about. But thanks for bearing with me. I'm sorry that was a no-show yesterday.

Rick Taylor [00:00:28] Aw, that was that fine. I appreciate you putting me off a time or two. So. But anyway, what, what - Tell me what all this is about.

David Todd [00:00:41] Yeah, well, let me lay that out right at the beginning so that we can know what we're trying to do here. So the idea is to record an interview with you as a member of this whole, whole conservation community in Texas, for research and educational work on behalf of a non-profit called the Conservation History Association of Texas, and also for a book and a Web site for Texas A&M University Press that we're working on. And finally, sort of for perpetuity, an archive that we have at the Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas at Austin. And the thought would be that w 'd also, of course, want this to be available to you, that you'd have all rights to use the recording as well.

David Todd [00:01:38] I was hoping that'll be OK with you.

Rick Taylor [00:01:41] You bet. Yeah, you bet. Anything I could, anything I can do to help. Now tell me a little bit about, I kind of looked at this Conservation History Association. Is that a group of people, or just kind of a I mean, explain that a little more to me. I mean, is it a association to join? Is it...

David Todd [00:02:00] Yeah. It's not really a membership group, but it was a non-profit we set up in '98. It was originally under the Texas Historical Commission and then we went off on

our own. And since then, we've really just tried to build a history of conservation efforts in the state. You know, land and wildlife and water and air and public health stuff.

Rick Taylor [00:02:27] Right.

David Todd [00:02:29] So we put out a couple of books and now we're working on this third book in and trying to talk to biologists around the state about various animals and their role in the environment.

Rick Taylor [00:02:42] Well you're picking a good time. You're picking a good time because a lot of the knowledgeable old-timers are going away. And these new guys, they could care less about the history. That's just a fact. You know, I mean, you just take, take guys like that are new to Parks and Wildlife. I mean, if it's not on the computer, but it's, I mean, they, you know, when I got on, you know, you kind of, kind of really looked up to the old-timers. You know, you wanted to meet them all. You want to hear what they had to say. But these new guys, I mean, there might be a few exceptions, but, you know, as a whole, I mean, I don't know how many of the younger guys you talk to as a whole, you know, they just don't seem to follow the same paths, you know, as we did. You know, it's, it's sad, but that's just way it is. I mean, you know, so I think the more old-timers that you get a hold of, I think the more you're going to, you know, that you're going to get out of it.

David Todd [00:03:40] Well, you know, what would be really great, is that after we do our visit today, maybe we can e-mail back and forth, and tell me who I should contact because, you know, you know, a ton of them. And I would love to get introductions.

Rick Taylor [00:03:55] Yeah, that would be good, because, you know, I mean I was very fortunate in in the sense that there were I came on board like in '81, a lot of the old timers were still around. You know, so I was able to meet some of the original biologists, you know, with the state and all. And I kind of was in that transition zone between the old school, you know, and the new school and, you know, just a just a lot extreme amount of changes has taken place. I mean, for an example, like, you know, we had 30 years of historical data, aerial survey data from South Texas, which I guess that just all got chunked in the garbage. And, you know, there was some good data that we had. But, you know, like I said, the new guys don't care. And, you know, they just didn't want to do anything with it. So it was stuck in the files, because I had it in the files with me in Uvalde for a long time. And the guy who took my place, you know, I think they just chunked it. A, a lot of good data back pre-, you know, pre-computer age type. But, you know, there's a lot of... But there's still some of the old timers still around that that, you know, especially when you look at the, of course, you don't get them, but we get all the people that are passing-their-retirement people. And, you know, I probably get you a list of some of those guys that are still around, guys like I think, Al Springs and Bobby Alexander and Ted Clark. I don't think they've all passed yet, you know, but like Ted ran the department for a while. You know, even Bob Cook, you know, don't know if you've talked to Bob Cook or not.

David Todd [00:05:31] I have not.

Rick Taylor [00:05:33] Yeah. Yeah. Yes. You know, Bob was, was a head of the Wildlife and also Executive Director for a while. And, you know, he, he came up through the ranks, unlike a lot of the new lot of the guys at headquarters in Austin. They didn't come up in the range. You know, even, even, even Carter didn't come up through the ranks, you know, as far as the field

staff and worked his way up to the top. But, you know, Bob did and several of those guys did. And, you know, they could really give you good insight of the, you know, the past and all.

David Todd [00:06:08] Well I'd be really grateful and, you know, so let's put that on the list of to-dos. I'd love to get your advice there. But for today, let's, let's do a little bit of an introduction to what we might be discussing and where and when this is happening.

David Todd [00:06:30] So just to put it down on tape, it is September 22nd, 2020. My name is David Todd. I'm here for the Conservation History Association of Texas and I'm in Austin. And we're conducting a phone interview with Rick Taylor, who's based near Uvalde, Texas, and he's a wildlife biologist who worked at Texas Parks and Wildlife for 27 years, I think. He's also a realtor, a rare books dealer and an author who has written about bears, hogs javelinas, deer, shrubs, cacti, other plants. So he's been busy.

David Todd [00:07:08] But today, we're just going to focus on one slice of his life and experience, and that's the history of the feral hog in Texas.

David Todd [00:07:17] And I thought we might just start with a question about your own background and how your interest in wildlife and the outdoors might have begun.

Rick Taylor [00:07:28] Well, I think like a lot of people, you know, start from... I was actually born in Corpus Christi and the son of a commercial fisherman. My dad, he was really from Florida, whose family actually founded the town of Cortez. And my mother is a farmer, was a farmer, and they farmed out of Robstown. And so I grew up and all my relatives were farmers on her, my dad's family was, of course, still in Florida. But anyway, all my relatives were farmers. So we spent a lot of our time, you know, going out to the farms and, and spent a lot of time outdoors. All the relatives were hunters and all that. So when we'd go the farms, you know, we'd hunt and spend time out there. And, you know, I started, you know, bird hunting early and, you know, deer hunting as well. And as, you know, grew up, you know, fish, hunting and fishing. And even in high school in Corpus, I was in the ag program and the only high school with an ag program. And at that point, I show pigs. And all my friends were you know, ag-related hunters, outdoor types, you know? So I just kind of grew up, even though I was in the city, I kind of grew up outdoors, you know, typical deal - Boy Scouts and camping and hunting and fishing and all that. So, you know, just fell in love with it. I've always, always had.

David Todd [00:08:58] Yeah, well, and tell me how you decided to become a biologist and then go on to work at Texas Parks and Wildlife.

Rick Taylor [00:09:09] Well, that's interesting itself, because when I started college in '76, I really didn't know there was such a thing as a biologist. You know, I loved, I went to college in general agriculture. You know, I thought I wanted to be a game warden, and because I knew I wanted to work in the outdoors. And to me, a game warden was the only thing out there. So it wasn't until I got to school that there was actually, I realized or found out that there was actually a wildlife program and a wildlife profession. And so, you know, I started, I changed my major into wildlife and actually got to start doing some field work, working with, you know, graduate students. And even at A&I-Kingsville, you know, we're able to actually do a lot of hands-on work, because it was a small college. And so we actually got to do a lot of, you know, a lot of wildlife work. And so anyway, so I went to wildlife and I've never regretted it.

Rick Taylor [00:10:13] As far as going to work for Parks and Wildlife. Back in those days, there weren't a whole lot of jobs available for wildlife people, not outside unless it was a

government agency through the state or federal, you know, maybe a few conservation organizations. But there were very few and far between. Jobs were extremely hard to come by. Matter of fact, I think there were like 300 applicants for my position when I, you know, when I first hired on - that shows how, how competitive it was. And so, anyway, there just wasn't a lot of jobs and anyway I was stuck with it, you know, I got turned down a half dozen times before I finally got on. And the rest you might say is history.

Rick Taylor [00:10:56] Now as far as working on feral hogs, a lot of that came about when I was with the department. I was, even prior to that, I'd worked on a ranch, in Webb County. And, you know, there were hogs on that. That ranch is about a ninety thousand acre ranch. I was working through the hunting season on it. So that was probably my first real taste of, you know, wild hogs and all. But even then, there weren't as many as there are now. And then when I went to work for Parks and Wildlife, a lot of our work that we're doing in the field, there's quite a bit of wild, there was quite a bit of hogs involved. For an example, we would be trapping deer, you know, on the coastal plains with drop nets and many times the hogs would come up there and start eating the corn. So, you know, you're sitting there watching them all the time. It's like, you know, what is going on here? And then when I transferred to South Texas, course, they were everywhere. Then we started, there was a lot of conversation amongst professionals. You know, what's going on here, you know, where do they impact at. And so just kind of came about that way, you know, and, you know. Raising hogs and I knew how smart they were, and then watching them out in the field as far as what they were doing. There's just a lot of questions that needed to be asked. And at that time in the early 80s, there weren't a whole lot of answers. And so we decided to hopefully find out some of the answers. So.

David Todd [00:12:27] OK. Well, maybe you should help us get a initial idea of how hogs first arrived in Texas. I think in your book *On Wild Hogs and Javelinas*, you talk about the early, early days, I mean, the 16th and 17th century, times when hogs were first introduced.

Rick Taylor [00:12:47] Yeah, actually, Christopher Columbus brought the first hogs into the New World back in the late 1400s, I think 1493 and brought them into the West Indies. They're a source of food. They're prolific. They sure, they, you know, they were useful for a lot of things.

Rick Taylor [00:13:09] But it was until about 40 years later when Hernando de Soto brought the first bunch from Cuba into Florida and that was like 1539, something like that, 1542. And he decided he was going to trek across southeastern United States to try to find his way to, into Mexico, you know, across the land, as opposed to going across on the, on the Gulf of Mexico. So they traveled across southeastern, the United States with, with the hogs that he brought from Florida. And I think he started out with, like I said, 13. And by the time he got Arkansas, or something, he had several hundred. And he died actually died in Arkansas.

Rick Taylor [00:14:00] But the second in command, a guy named Luis de Moscoso, he took over and pushed them on into Texas, probably crossing around Fort Worth or maybe below there. And before he decided to turn back to, you know, this thing, this being on happens. So anyway, that there were several hundred hogs crossed into Texas, you know, like I said, late or mid-1500s. And what they said is, that the reason he turned around was because they'd hit the open prairies, and that there wasn't enough food for the hogs to forage. You know, they'd left the oak trees and the pine trees and some foraging areas. Then once they hit the prairies, there wasn't the food to keep the hogs going. And they said that was one of the reasons why that, he had, that he went ahead and turned around and went back.

Rick Taylor [00:14:55] And then, of course, later on, Rene de La Salle when he tried to, to start a colony for the French, on Matagorda Island or Matagorda Bay, he brought some hogs with him, as well, and that was in, that was probably one hundred years later and in the late 1600s. And he actually, and he had some hogs, or he brought some hogs with his colonists out there. And of course that was a fiasco. La Salle's killed by his soldiers and you know, all the colonists died and all. But anyway the hogs, they escaped or were gone. And the Indians actually called them "the dogs of the French". And they, they, they wouldn't touch him. They thought they were voodoo or whatever, but they didn't, you know, they don't want to eat them. So they've been, you know, hogs have been in and out for a long time. And throughout the 1700s, you know, hogs were found at many of the Spanish missions as well. So they've been in and out for, you know, for quite, quite a long time.

Rick Taylor [00:16:01] And it probably wasn't until actually the colonization of Texas, you know, the early 1800s, 1830s, you know, before, you know, before Texas independence when the colonists came, that they were also bringing hogs. And so those probably started, I doubt that any of those early ones ever survived into the wild. So I mean they've been coming and going for, you know, 500 years almost.

David Todd [00:16:32] And my understanding, from what you were writing, was that a lot of these early hogs were allowed to range freely. They weren't fenced and they were out, I guess, rooting for mast and trying to support themselves. Is that right?

Rick Taylor [00:16:50] Yeah, that's exactly right. You know, back in the early days, they didn't, we didn't have fencing. You've heard of open range and all that. Well, that's, that's how they fed, you know, the farmers, they didn't raise corn to feed the animals. They raised corn to feed themselves and maize and, you know, vegetables and stuff like that. But pigs themselves, they had to just go out on their own. And usually the farmers, or colonists, they would have dogs or something like that when it came time to get them, they'd round them up with the dogs and bring them back in.

Rick Taylor [00:17:19] So but other than that, they were just out there free ranging and growing on what you say that, you know, the natural resources of Texas. And when it came time to butcher or, or work them, they would go out and bring them in. And many of them, they didn't bring in. They couldn't bring in or they, you know, they ran off or they just couldn't gather 'em up. So, yeah, free ranging. You know, fencing didn't even come in until, you know, the late 19th century, early 20th century. And even then there was a lot that they didn't. You know, this was free food. You put those hogs out there, let them eat on their own. It didn't cost you anything. And so it was easy. It was easy for them to to raise hogs. It didn't cost them anything. They were prolific. They provided food, lard, bacon. I mean, they just, they were used for everything, almost. They were very valuable to the early settlers. So. Yeah, so free ranging. And that's the way I mean that, that was only, their only choice.

David Todd [00:18:29] So I was interested to read a little bit about the passage of the stock laws. So I guess it's still going on. But, you know, starting, I guess, in the early 20th century where some of these hogs were expected to be kept within bounds. Can you tell me a little bit about the passage of some of those laws?

Rick Taylor [00:18:54] I really, I really, I really can't, I really don't have a whole lot of knowledge as far as the stock laws on the hogs, and I really, I really can't, I really don't have a comment on that. You know, per se, because, like I said, they've been free ranging forever. But,

you know, as far as the laws that you're talking, I can touch base on you on laws regarding hogs and all that. But as far as livestock laws, you know back then and I haven't, I'm not real familiar with all that. And so I don't want to say something that that I'd be wrong about.

David Todd [00:19:30] OK. Fair enough. Well, something else that I did not know about, and was interested to learn from you, from your book, was that a lot of these, these pigs were released, abandoned, during hard times, during the Runaway Scrape in 1836 and then again during the Depression of the 1930s. Maybe you can tell us a little bit about that.

Rick Taylor [00:19:56] Yeah. As we were talking about the free range and, you know, about the farmers and colonists, you know, letting their hogs range freely, when the war for independence in Texas started to come about, and Mexico was, was come, you know, Santa Ana was coming up into south Texas. A lot of colonies got scared. And so they just, they had to abandon their houses. And that's what's called the Runaway Scrape of 1836. And, you know, a lot of colonists, when, when Santa Ana was coming up San Antonio, they were scared. And so they, they just left everything, not just their livestock, but everything. I mean, all they took was what they could carry on their back, or on their horse or whatever. And so, you know, they sure couldn't push their hogs. They might have pushed some oxen or horses or stuff like that. But the hogs, they just basically, just, they had to let them go. And as we've been discussing on free ranging hogs, they're not going to, I mean, they're going to survive well. And the same happened during the Depression in the, in the, the late 20s and early 30s, you know, when farmers were losing their land and times were hard and lot of the farmers were going off to the city to find work. Well, there's nothing they could do with their stock. And so specifically the hogs, so, again, at that time, they also just had to, they just let the farms. And they headed to the city trying to find work and food for the family. So they just let them go. And so hard times is also another time when the hogs were left on their own.

Rick Taylor [00:21:43] Now, the thing about it is, prior to all of those times, there were diseases, parasites, there were a lot of things that kept the hogs in check. Natural things, not so much predators, but disease like I said diseases, parasites, things like that. So they weren't really able to get established in the wild. Now, I'm not saying they, they didn't get established, but they were heavily, they were kept in check.

Rick Taylor [00:22:14] And so, but yeah, I mean, so the whole free-ranging, the whole, all of that has, you know, even bringing them across. It's the hog, it was the hog's ability to forage and survive on the native pasture land, you know, without the help of humans. And that's why they're so adaptable, because they can eat pretty much anything. And our research has shown that they're very, that they can shift their diets and that they're they're omnivorous, they'll eat almost anything. So with that, that forging and feeding ability, has allowed them to just do well every time they've been left alone.

David Todd [00:23:08] I was reading again in your book and there's this fascinating story about kind of second or third round of introductions after the explorers, and then after the early Texas settlers - some of these landowning families, I guess the Denmans and then I think you mentioned a family up in Bandera County who brought in Eurasian or Russian hogs, that they had gotten from zoos. And that they released them on the landscape? Can you talk to us a little bit about how that came about and what the effects were?

Rick Taylor [00:23:46] Well, I think the first thing you need to understand, or people need to understand, is the Eurasian or Russian boar and the domestic hog, there's basically no genetic difference between the two. OK? The domestic hog is just a offspring of the pure European or

wild hogs, that which were domesticated thousands of years ago. OK? And so when you when you talk Russian boar, Eurasian hogs, versus, you know, your feral hogs, you need to understand that there's actually no biological difference between the two. There are some morphological characteristics. But as far as that, they're still the same species as *Sus scrofa*.

Rick Taylor [00:24:36] So I think that's the first thing to note that's important. Now, the ones that they released down along the coast, supposedly they came from the San Antonio Zoo. Now whether the zoo needed the space to put other animals, or they just didn't want them there, whatever. And so they got rid of 'em. And the way I understand it, the Denmans picked some up and dumped some down there around Port O'Connor on their ranch, I think it was called the Powderhorn Ranch back in the old days, in that time. Why they did it? I mean, who knows? You know, you can speculate, you know, because I don't think they, particular family were, you know, were really at that time were commercially hunting them. I don't know if they released him for hunting purposes or opportunity to just have another species on the ranch to impress or, who knows? Why that they picked them up and released them. Like I said, maybe it was just opportunistic. You know, they were given opportunity to have them. "You want them? Yeah, we'll dump them out there at the ranch."

Rick Taylor [00:25:45] Well, the same would be true in the hill country as well. Suppose these people, rancher, bought some from the traveling zoo and put them on his place and many of them escaped or were released, whether it be a flood or, or bad fencing, you know, whatever. So, again, it's possible that the Hill Country Eurasians might have been put out there to increase hunting opportunities. But once again, nobody really knows at least haven't been able to find out why they, they did it.

Rick Taylor [00:26:23] You know, we know for a fact that later on, you know, decades later, people were releasing them for the purpose of hunting. But at that time, you know, you know, the early, you know, late 30s, early 40s, why they did it - you know, who knows?

Rick Taylor [00:26:39] I think the most important thing is as we go farther on, is to understand that there's really no difference between the two, you know, between the two species. Now, what will happen, is that if you take a domestic hog and you put him into the wild, through generations of time, he will revert back to that Eurasian or Russian appearance, with the short you know, the long snout, smaller hams, the longer, you know, bristled hair you see. And the same true if you took a Eurasian out of the wild and, and put them in the pen and domesticated him, his progeny would eventually revert to more of a domestic appearance. So I hope that makes sense to you.

David Todd [00:27:36] Yes, that helps a lot. Thank you. And I gather that the, as you were saying, that there's a lot of genetic similarity, maybe they're identical between the feral hogs and the European law.

Rick Taylor [00:27:49] Yes.

David Todd [00:27:50] And they were breeding and, and that affected the hog populations overall in Texas?

Rick Taylor [00:27:59] You know, I don't know if those early releases had a whole lot to do with anything. I mean, like I said, that they will there, they will readily interbreed. If there were any domestic or feral hogs out there when these Eurasians release, they, they wouldn't

have a problem with, with crossbreeding or interbreeding. So there is that strong possibility, you know, that, that there you know, that there was some interbreeding.

Rick Taylor [00:28:29] And I think, too, that when they were dropped along the you know, the coastal prairies, you see that was some of the areas where Stephen Austin and some of the earlier settlers had settled. So there's probably a really good chance that there were plenty of free-ranging hogs in those days.

Rick Taylor [00:28:48] So when they released them, especially along the coastal area around Port O'Connor / Seadrift, if there were any free-ranging hogs there, I'm sure the wild ones would have found them. Or I should say the Russians would have found them and they would have easily interbred. But again, I don't think that that had any bearing on the population increase or the range expansion, those little few little rinky-dink releases of Eurasians.

David Todd [00:29:25] I think that you mentioned just in passing a few minutes ago that there were some intentional releases in decades, you know, later. My guess is up to the modern day. Is that a big factor, you think, in how hogs have expanded their range? Or is this just a natural phenomenon that they're, they're exploring and seeking new territories without human help?

Rick Taylor [00:29:55] No, no. That, that's, that's undoubtedly the primary reason Texas is in the position it is, as far as the feral hogs or wild hogs, is because the intentional releases. Because up until, you know, hunting really got to be popular probably in the 50s or 60s. Before that, people would let 'em, people, come out there and hunt deer and all that. But after that time, I said the 50s or 60s, landowners were realizing that there was money to be made through hunting leases and allowing hunters to come out there. So, and that was important because you know, ranchers, they needed that extra income. And so as a hunting lease process increased in Texas, you know, of course, Texas, is 97% privately owned, and, and economically the lease prices were very, it was very important. Especially if you got into a drought like the Great Drought of the 50s, when things were bad. I mean, land owners had to come up with ways to keep their property. And hunting has always been, and now it's an unbelievably important business. Sometimes, some people, it's even more important than livestock that's on the ranch. So the hunting opportunity was very important. And so that's when a lot of people started, you know, going into that. And you'd go to the auction barn and buy some and dump them out on ranch. Now, that was, and it really peaked, I won't say peaked, but it really hit it hard probably, you know, in, you know, 70s on into the 80s where they were doing it.

Rick Taylor [00:31:46] And that, you know, these intentional releases of domestic hogs into the wild, had a great impact on the population in Texas, along with, you know, better animal husbandry, habitat management, all the stuff that we've done for our domestic livestock and even our native wildlife, everything we've done to improve that, the hogs just say, "thank you." The hogs have benefited with everything we've done, eradication of disease, everything we've done to improve our domestic livestock, our wildlife, our range management, everything we've done. The hog has probably benefitted the most out of all of the species. I mean, I shouldn't say that because, of course, the livestock, it has. But as far as your wildlife species, the hogs have really benefited.

David Todd [00:32:42] Well, so I guess maybe you can give us some example, I mean, I think something you've mentioned - controlled disease, I guess, hog cholera and screw worms. Were those, would those be examples?

Rick Taylor [00:32:57] Yeah. You bet. You bet. Oh, hog cholera, screw worms. You know, I mean, I mean so many different diseases. Again, it's not just diseases. Water distribution, you know, stock tanks, watering facilities, you know, rotational grazing, you know, having, you know, just planting, you know, your food you know, you might say your food plots. More, more land brought into cultivation, more land being cleared of brush, I mean, all of that stuff, you know, has added up. I mean, it's just you, you can imagine everything we've done to improve for livestock, you know, has benefited hogs. And then in the 70s when one whitetail deer management really kicked off, and you know, and I'm talking about people trying to raise trophy whitetailed deer, you know, that really expanded, you know, from the supplemental feeding out there, again to the water distribution, the habitat management. I mean, we tried so hard to improve the habitat, to grow big deer and the hogs just followed along, just enjoying their opportunities.

David Todd [00:34:30] So they were just sort of collateral, they benefited on the side from the efforts that were really focused on traditional agriculture or on raising these trophy deer.

Rick Taylor [00:34:39] Yes. That's a good that's an excellent way to put it. You bet. Collateral. Yeah. And keep in mind too, all this while this is going on, while we're improving the habitat, while we're doing all that, you know, eradicating diseases, you know, vaccines, everything that we're doing for our livestock, at the same time hunters, maybe not the landowners, but they're still releasing more of these domestic hogs into the wild. So all this is happening. I would say probably, it really hit hard, I think in probably the mid-60s to early 70s, that that's when it really, that's when whitetail deer management really kicked off. And, and the way the, how the biology of the hog, I mean, it takes a while for that exponential, I mean, you've got two, then you've got 4, then you got 8, then you got 16. So we weren't really paying attention. And all of a sudden it all, it all hit and they're saying, "where did all these hogs come from?" Well, they've been here. We just weren't paying attention till now. There's nothing we can really we can do about it.

David Todd [00:35:53] So I guess another issue with the hogs is they, they breed so frequently and with such big litters?

Rick Taylor [00:36:02] Yeah. And that's another thing. And there's a lot of false ideas. A lot of people say, yeah, you know how you know, they don't have three litters a year and you know, this, that and the other. Well, that's not true. You know, even though their gestation is, you know, 115 days, something like that, if you put it on paper, it might look like it. But research has shown that, that, you know, that hogs only going to have, only a small percent is going to have a second litter, but they can have up to 14, but I believe their average is probably 6 or 7, probably their average. But when they're capable of breeding at 6 to 9 months of age, by the end of the first year, that sow is already a grandmother many times over. So, even though she might only have one, and possibly a possibly a second, litter, it doesn't matter, because by the end of the year, she's grandmaw anyway - just to show you how prolific they are.

Rick Taylor [00:37:06] And, you know, I would also mention, too, that it's important on this expansion and these numbers is, hogs don't really, do not really have any natural mortality or enemies. Once they reach, you know, a few months of age, I mean, you'll have your predators, you know, your coyotes, your bobcats, your mountain lions, that might get them when they're young, but after they reach a certain age, they're pretty much on their own. So if this, so if diseases and things like that aren't there to keep them in check, well, then what is besides man? And so it's no natural predators to speak of, their prolific breeding, I mean, their ability

to eat and forage, their diet. I mean, all that stuff adds up. And so you really can't put one thing. You know, you really can't blame it on one thing, but you put it all together and it's no wonder would have the numbers of pigs we do today, you know, free-ranging in in Texas.

David Todd [00:38:10] And I guess because there's so many of them, because of the way they feed, there's just a lot of damage to property. Maybe you can talk a little bit about the effect that hogs have on pastures and crop fields and wildlife feeders and springs, creeks and so on.

Rick Taylor [00:38:31] You can go on and on, and you mentioned several right there. You know, I mean, their, their feeding ability primarily, they, they do a lot of rooting using their snout. And that's why your, your, your Eurasian, your Russian boars always have that super long snout, heavy shoulders and smaller hands because they're using all their front end to dig up, looking for roots and tubers and, you know, bugs and things like that. So that's, that's, that's their, that's their modus operandi, operanda or however you want to say it, to search for food, they're just always rooting and foraging the ground, which of course, that, that causes tremendous amount of damage to your pastures, your hay fields, of course, any farm crops. You know, they'll eat anything that's out there in the farm. So, but it's not just their rooting, but they're stomping around and trampling. You go into a corn field after hogs have been there, and I mean, they'll just they'll tear up an acre of land, you know, just trying to get to food, you know, and you'll see the corn laid over and crops down. And just it's, it's there foraging that causes a lot of that damage. And of course, they'll get into feeders - any kind of feeders, livestock feeders, wildlife feeders - and also it's that rooting and wallowing because they, they do get into the watering areas to cool off. And so they root and wallow and so they can really tear up, harm, you know, your wetlands, your springs. They've, I seen where they just make a mudhole out of a beautiful, crystal-clear spring, wallowing around in there, rooting around, trying to get, you know, plants in there. And I mean, they can do tremendous damage in that. So, yeah, they're, they're very, they're very destructive in their eating. And the thing is, you get more than, you know, you get several of them and you can imagine get two or three, not one by one, but you get a whole, you know, herd of them, and that damage can really get extensive.

David Todd [00:40:52] So you invent you sort of harm they can do the crop yields, pastures, wetland and so on. Tell me a little bit about the effect on wildlife and particularly livestock, I guess sheep and goats when they're young?

Rick Taylor [00:41:09] Well, I think...

David Todd [00:41:09] There's some impacts there?

Rick Taylor [00:41:12] Well, you know, the impact, first of all, you need to explain their diet. Like I mentioned before, the hog is omnivorous. They'll eat plant material and animal material. However, 93% of their diet, at least what we found in our research, is plant-based, or plant material, which could be grasses, could be weeds, forbs, could be roots, tubers. I mean, it could be anything plant-related, vegetated-related. Okay, so that's that, that's the majority to their diet. Only a small percent is going to be animal matter, you know, probably, 10% of this. Now you get in others areas of the country, their diet might have little more animal material in it. But even then, you're talking about invertebrates, you know, bugs, you know, maybe some amphibians, reptiles, things that they can reap, things that they can easily get. They're opportunistic. They're not active. They're just, they're just, I mean, I just want to say they're just pigs - they just eat anything that's in their way. And so it's important to know their diet. They're primarily vegetarians. However, they will have some animal matter in their system.

Rick Taylor [00:42:29] Now, as far as their impact on wildlife. Again, they're opportunistic. In our research, we only found very few instances where we found, say, wildlife, deer or anything like that in their, in their stomachs. So what we did find it, but they are not active predators. They will not run them down, run down a deer and chase them. Same with the turkey and quail eggs. You know, they're opportunistic. So if they're rooting around, they come across a turkey nest or a quail nest because they're ground-nesting birds, well, yeah, they're not going to go around it. If they, if they root across it, they're going to, they're going to eat it.

Rick Taylor [00:43:19] And a lot of this, now, when you talk about the impact on ground-nesting birds and even your native wildlife, you've got to think about the habitat conditions. In a poorly managed ranch, the impact is going to be great because you don't have the, number one, you don't have the protective cover which your native species need. And number two, you're not going to have more food available for the hogs. So that will increase with poor range management. OK? So the impact on deer, quail and turkey we've found is, is pretty limited. It's not that, you know, quail, especially, have a extremely high mortality. And so does a hog going to increase that mortality? No. Well, we, we call it compensatory mortality, which means they're going to die anyway. So it's not going to increase. It's not going to increase its, or decrease its survival because there's chance are the quail, you know, they're gonna die anyway for other things.

Rick Taylor [00:44:34] OK. Now, let's get back, back to, on your domestic animals. The same is true with domestic. Your, your sheep and goats primarily in the Hill Country. They're opportunistic. So if they come across a kid goat or a lamb and that lamb sits there, I'm not gonna say that he, that he's not going to, you know, attempt to, you know, eat him or get him. A lot of times, though, again, range management is extremely important. And a lot of your sheep and goat country in the Hill Country, a lot of that, a lot of the areas are, you might say, overgrazed. Some of the country might not have the other ground cover it needs. And so, again, it makes them more susceptible to predation by hogs. OK?

Rick Taylor [00:45:29] Now, having said that, once the hog, there has been some research showing that once the hog takes a lamb or a kid goat, they can become more, I don't know how to say it, more... Once they've killed one or two and ate 'em, they become more trained to look for that type of food. I mean, I don't know exactly the word to put it up, David, I guess you're going to edit all this, right?

David Todd [00:46:15] You've been doing fine. Just go right ahead.

Rick Taylor [00:46:19] No, I mean so I don't want to say that that they will not prey upon sheep and goats. But primarily, it's a trained, it's a trained, it's a trained habit because hog and I didn't touch on this, are extremely, extremely intelligent. They are probably the most intelligent animal out there on all aspects. And so, yes, if they know that, if opportunity arises, they will. But again, it's a trained, it's a trained pattern for them. You know, you're not going to hear the average hog going to chase, or your average hog is not going to chase sheep and goats.

David Todd [00:47:01] OK. I see. Well, what do you think about the risk of these wild hogs sharing and spreading of pseudorabies, brucellosis, sicknesses, diseases like that?

Rick Taylor [00:47:16] Well, I. Well, what, what we're, we're very concerned with some of that. However, pseudorabies and swine brucellosis and that kind of, those are the two main ones we're concerned with. The main concern, though, is what they will do to domestic hogs. That's where the concern is. And in east Texas, there are still areas where, you know, hog farmers have, you know, that they some of their areas are opened up where they can possibly have some wild animals come in to get to some sows and such. So I don't think a great concern is with our native wildlife population, much as it is, our domestic hog population. That seems to be where their real concerns are, the impact of diseases in our wild hogs to be transmitted to our domestic hogs, not so much that they're going to do it to deer.

Rick Taylor [00:48:14] Now, the possibility is there, you know. You know, on some of your other diseases. But as a whole, I mean, obviously, they don't seem to be impacted much because our deer population in Texas and all the other, you know, just exploded. So, but, but with work I've done, it's more, they're more concerned with their impact on the domestic swine.

David Todd [00:48:40] Well, you explained how, you know, these numbers and the range of these hogs has spread and their impacts with them. Can you talk a little bit about some of the strategies that hunters and landowners have used to try to control hogs?

Rick Taylor [00:49:01] OK. There's really, I will hit that, but first I want to say say, is it at this point, there is no way to eradicate a hog population. Once your hogs, you've got hogs, you're pretty much gonna have them. I mean, you can spend a lot of money on an individual ranch, which would include, you know, hog-proof fencing, you know, and then getting in there with helicopters and dogs and then maybe eradicate them. But that's gonna be very, very expensive. So, generally, I tell people, you're not going to eradicate them. The best you can do is to control them. And in order to control your population, you've got to use all, you've got to use everything you've got. You've got to use hunters to help. It's got to be continuous effort. Hunting them, trapping them, shooting at them out of helicopters, aerial gunning. All of these things have to be used. Now, if you're low-fenced, you know, you're really in a bind because you can clean out yours, but they're just going to come back from the neighbors. Dogs, that's another. They know hogs don't like dogs. And so you, but you need it, has to be continuous. Now, if you have if you have a high-fenced ranch, you know, and you're trying to raise, you know, big deer, whitetailed deer, the smaller your property, the more chance you have of keeping them out, if you keep the fences, patrol and stuff, you know, and things like that. I have known ranchers that have been able to have, high-fenced ranches, that have been able to get rid of the hogs. But even then, I've seen them say a year or two later, well, we've seen hogs in here. Where they came from, who knows? But I mean, so fencing, if your fences are good, and I'm talking about a hog fence, or, you know, and that they will dig under it pretty easy. Some of the strategies. Like I said, you really need use all the techniques, sportsmen hunting, dogs, helicopters, every... There's no toxins available, no poisons available yet. So really, you've just got to keep after 'em, you know, trap them. You've got to use every technique in the book to try to keep that population under control. And again, the larger the ranch, the harder it's going to be.

David Todd [00:51:42] I think you mentioned that there are no poisons available. I heard that there were proposals a while back, to put out something called Kaput. I guess it is a blood thinner, warfarin.

Rick Taylor [00:51:53] Yeah, warfarin. Yeah.

David Todd [00:51:57] What happened with that?

Rick Taylor [00:51:58] Well, number one, there wasn't any research actually done on the hogs. There's no doubt that it kill them cause it kills rats and mice and everything else. But the impact that poison could do on, you know, on other species, if they get it, was not tested, it wasn't researched. There was very little research done with that stuff. And I mean, there's no doubt, you know, warfarin, you know, will kill them. But what else? What, what are your side effects? And I looked into that and I didn't, you know, there's very, very little research on that done. It was very poorly done. And the last thing you want to do is put a poison out there that's going to kill a bunch of other species, or cause problems. So, I mean that, now there is something... now Australia has came up with, they've got a couple, you know, poisons out there that work good, and one that's being tested now in the state. It's sodium nitrite. And that has, has some potential, as far as that goes. However, it has to be delivered in a way that only hogs can get. Because, you know, it will also impact other species. And that's the main concern of any toxin, is what impact is that going to have on your native species? You know, is it going to kill all the 'coons? is it going to kill bears if they get it? Is it going to, you know, what happens when it dribbles, you know, when some of that poison drops off and I like I said, your non-target species get it. And that's the main concern right now is the impact, you know, on other species. And even if you have a toxin, you know, it's going to have to be regulated. But also, that's something that you can't do it on a statewide basis or you might, you might have some success on a particular ranch, something like that. But it's not going to, it's not, it's not going to impact the population overall in the entire state. Same with that warfarin. But, you know, it's not going to do anything. Even if they, even if it was allowed, it's not going to have any long-term impact on the, on Texas, and on the population. So that's, and that's a better a real touchy subject. You start getting into toxins or poisons, I mean, there's, there's a lot of people out there. I mean, you can you know, you, you open up a can of worms with that.

David Todd [00:54:31] Well it sounds like hunting may be one of the better options. Can you talk about some of the guide operations that are out there? And maybe if you've been on any hog hunts yourself, tell about those stories?

Rick Taylor [00:54:49] Well, there's all kinds of different hog-hunting opportunities, and you can find them pretty much anywhere. Just, you know, either Google them or look them up in magazines. But there's different types of hunting. You know, you have your, your regular going out, sitting in a deer stand, over a feeder type, you know. And one thing that's important, too, I think that we need to discuss, too, are the laws and regulations in Texas regarding hogs. Number one, hogs are considered a, are not considered a game animal in Texas, they're considered non-game, an exotic species. They're not regulated by Parks and Wildlife. They're not considered wildlife, even though they're like the number two free-ranging species out there across the state, beyond the whitetail deer. They're still not considered wildlife. They're considered, they're still considered livestock. So you've got a lot of different agencies out there, but you do have to have a hunting license to hunt them, unless it's on your property you don't have to. But your average hunter has to have a hunting license to hunt them. That's the only thing required by Parks and Wildlife. There's no seasons, no bag limits. You can hunt them at night. You can hunt from the air. You can you can hunt them any way you want.

Rick Taylor [00:56:11] There are regulations now with Animal Health Commission that you can no longer release hogs into the wild. I mean, that, you, that's gone. You can't do that. However, many people are still doing it because the enforcement aspect of it is, is very, kind of limited as far as being able to catch people that's still doing it. But there's still some of that

intentional releases going on. So you've got the Animal Health Commission involved in that. Of course, they're monitoring the swine brucellosis the pseudorabies on the hog end of it.

Rick Taylor [00:56:50] You've got your livestock industry that's monitoring them somewhat because, again, they're considered livestock. And then you got your game department, which, you know, your Parks and Wildlife, which has no impact on it. You know, people say, well, can we have some rules or can we have some laws? What can we do, to do, what can we do to reduce this population? Well, there are no laws is going to do it. It's as open as you can get as it is. I mean, you can kill them anyway, any time anyhow. You know, so putting laws is not going to do anything to make things worse probably.

Rick Taylor [00:57:27] So having said that. So since you can hunt them anyway, there's a lot of different hog hunting opportunities right now. As of several years ago, laws were passed to allow sport hunting by helicopter with a proper, with the proper regulations, rules, you know, with proper, proper permits and regulations, you can allow hunting from the air. A lot of, there's quite a few helicopter operations that do that. You also, there's hog hunting with dogs. There's a lot of outfitters out there that have dogs. And you can, you know, and a lot of these outfitters have access to ranches. So there's that. You've also got your regular hog hunts, you know, over feeders or sitting in a stand. So there's a lot of different options.

Rick Taylor [00:58:28] The other thing about how hog-hunting is because they're not regulated, they make for a great off-season hunt. Once deer season's over with. There's no other seasons. You know, you can hunt them the spring and summer. So it does provide an off-season type hunt for people that are interested in it. There's all kinds of various hog operation, hog-hunting operations. You just have to do a little research and find, you know, find one that you like, in an area that you want to go because they're pretty much everywhere.

Rick Taylor [00:59:02] One of the problems, though, we still have is that landowners still do not like to have people access their property. You know, there's liability. So you can't just say, "hey, can I come out there and hog-hunt?" Even though the landowner wants them gone, they do not allow people out there on their property just to go out there to try to hunt hogs. Liability's a big concern these days. You know, you trip on a stick, you know, they're going to sue you. So, yeah, that's a, that's a concern, too. So right now and, because it is privately owned, you almost have to have a guided hunting operation that will allow, that has their own land owners that they work with who are allowed to go out there.

Rick Taylor [00:59:51] I get a lot of people call me all the time, hey, you know anyone who'll let me come out there and shoot hogs. No, because of liability. I know, a lot of land owners, but they're not going to let you come out there, especially if they don't know you. And you know yourself, with all the lawyers out there looking for a big payday. And there's a lot of landowners out there, there's a lot of landowners out there with a lot of money. So they're very concerned about that.

David Todd [01:00:19] Well, have there been any hog hunts that you remember as being particularly fun or exciting?

Rick Taylor [01:00:28] Well, you know, I almost say this. I've been on a lot of hog hunts. I mean, you know, from the air, with dogs, horses, every which way and I'm going to say this: they're, they're all exciting. Every one of them. When you're, when you're hunting, especially when you're hunting with dogs, there's nothing more thrilling than a dog chasing a hog and

baying him up. And then you getting in there. So they're all, in my opinion, they're all exciting. They can be very dangerous. Most people now, once they're with dogs, they'll release the dogs. And once you hear him holler, you know, you'll start the chase. And once they bay him up, most people then will go out there, and they'll, you know, they're go in there and stick him and they're not going to shoot them. They're going to pull his back legs, hold him down and stab him. It's like, and hogs can be very dangerous, especially with, you know, you get a sow with some young ones or a wounded one, they can be extremely dangerous. Now, I would say that, you know, if you contacted, you know, sure enough, hog dog people, people with the dogs go out there all the time, it makes for a heck of a sport as well. Now, those people have all kinds of stories. I don't really have a, I mean, like they've all been fun, exciting, no traumatic experience, no harrowing escapes, you know, for me, you know, like the ones you read about. You know, helicopter hunts - a lot of people, you know, a lot of people find those pretty, pretty exciting.

Rick Taylor [01:02:09] I think I had one of my most, I guess, fun time when we're trapping mountain lions down in between Encino and Freer in the Nueces River bottom. I'd caught, you know, we'd caught some hogs. We were always catching hogs in our lion snares. And, and I remember one in particular that I'd caught, this little hog in one, and I was, I was just going to let him out. And so I went up there to let him out. And, and I had a rope, I was going to rope him. He was in a foot snare. So I was going to rope him. So I slung the rope at him. And when I did, he came at me and I jerked the rope, you know, trying to tighten it up. And of course, I backed up and I fell over a prickly pear, got stuck full of prickly pear and didn't break my finger. But about broke it, you know, and and I still to this day, my fingers stuck off in a far-off direction.

Rick Taylor [01:03:10] But again, it wasn't, it was funny on my part because I had a butt full of prickly pear and a broke, half-broken finger. But other than that, you know, like I said, they're all, they've all been fun, because you'd never know, you never know whenever you chase a hog with a dog, you don't know what's going to be there. You don't know how he's gonna react. So all I can say, just people, they just have to be careful.

David Todd [01:03:40] Well, you've been generous with your time. But let me just ask you a couple more questions if you don't mind. Maybe when you look back at your experience with wild hogs, have you taken any sort of lessons about issues of just generally invasives and exotics versus native creatures, and, you know, what the problems are facing the state there?

Rick Taylor [01:04:17] Well, I mean, there's a lot of problems. Hogs are just one, they're just, they're just the big ones, you know. But I mean, there is a lot of invasive species and exotics. I mean, you look just like your exotic mammals, you know, your axis deer, your fallow deer. You know, you look at what's plagued the Hill Country and the amount of habitat damage they've done. So there's no doubt that these exotics and these invasive species have caused a tremendous amount of problems.

Rick Taylor [01:04:51] Unfortunately, I don't think there's anything that we can do about a lot of stuff, you know, this is it. It's, it's a shame, you know. But, you know, we watch it on everything. You know, you look at the, what is the, the mollusks, you know, that are, you know, some of the rivers and creeks that are really taken over. There's just I mean, everything - from fish, to plants, I mean, it's just. I just, I don't know what to say. Unfortunately, with so many of these species, even fire ants, so many species we just can't. It is too late. We should have controlled them when we had a chance. I wish, I wish I could say more.

David Todd [01:05:48] Well, as far as saying more, is there anything you'd like to add, as we wrap this up.

Rick Taylor [01:05:58] And I think, again, we, we, we we've covered all, I think we've pretty much touched on everything, the history of them, a little bit about the biology of them, management of them. You know, I think we've pretty well hit. I'm sure there's some things that we'll both think of when we hang up.

Rick Taylor [01:06:19] But what I'd like to do, I like to always end my programs with, with this. And it's Frederick Olmstead who traveled to Texas in 1854. He stated that at his camp near Crockett on January 1st, 1854, he said,

Rick Taylor [01:06:40] "We were annoyed by hogs beyond all description. At almost every camp, we were surrounded by them. But here they seem perfectly frantic with hunger. They ran directly through the fire and even carried off a chicken that was dressed and spitted. While the horses were feeding, it required constant attendance of two of us to keep them at bay. Even then, they secured more than half the corn. Fanny, his horse was so shocked and disturbed, that she refused all the food. For some minutes, the fiercest of them would resist even a clubbing - eating and squealing on through the blows. These animals proved, indeed, throughout Texas a disgusting annoyance, though, after procuring an excellent dog a day or two after we were rid of the worst of it."

Rick Taylor [01:07:29] And further on his trip west in the Texas Hill Country, in Kendall County, near the head of the Guadalupe river, he claimed,

Rick Taylor [01:07:38] "One of the greatest sources of profit is from the droves of hogs which increase with remarkable rapidity and pick their living from the roots and nuts of river bottoms. The distribution of a few ears of corn at night brings them all every day to the crib."

Rick Taylor [01:07:55] Throughout his travels, he reports,

Rick Taylor [01:07:57] "Bacon and pork were easier to obtain than beef!"

Rick Taylor [01:08:00] And I'd say this was in 1854, so hogs have been around for several hundred years and they're going to be around here to stay they'll be here forever as long as Texas is here.

David Todd [01:08:17] Part of the state.

Rick Taylor [01:08:18] Yeah, that is they, they are a natural part of Texas fauna.

David Todd [01:08:25] Well, thank you for explaining all this and telling us, you know, the many years of the story and all the different aspects of it. So I appreciate your help here and I wish you well and thank you very much for taking time to talk to us.

Rick Taylor [01:08:42] Thank you, David. And I know there's going to be some stuff that I forgot. And if you have any more questions, feel free to call me and we can add some more stuff to it.

David Todd [01:08:50] Goodby. I hope we can keep in touch. Thank you so much.

Rick Taylor [01:08:53] We will. Thank you. Have a great day. Bye bye.

David Todd [01:08:56] Bye.