

# A Look Back: When wild boar slipped away from the game preserve

by [Steve Taylor](#) November 1, 2025



Plainfield farmers gather at the conclusion of a wild boar hunt on Black Hill in 1955. In front with tracking dogs are Ralph Woodward, Alan Jansen and John Meyette. Standing are Albert "Abe" Read, Palmer "June" Read, Ralph Jordan and Clarence King. Crop production in the area had been plagued for years by the animals which owed their origins to Corbin's Park. (Plainfield Historical Society)

Tromping through the woods of northern Sullivan County, your rifle is loaded and you're scanning the terrain ahead when suddenly you spot a wild boar in the underbrush. It's always open season on the species, so you draw a bead; but, uh oh, you need to call the Blue Mountain Forest Association's central station — the place is better known as Corbin's Park — over in Croydon to get permission to shoot.

That's what an advisory opinion from the New Hampshire Attorney General's Office says a hunter should have in hand, and it provokes lusty guffaws from the Upper Valley's community of riflemen, who have been shooting the critters unimpeded for more than three generations.

The state Fish and Game Department has been told that the wild boar roaming outside the confines of the vast park are technically the property of the park and can't be shot without park management's permission.



A young female wild boar displays the species' typical tall shoulders and long snout, which were brought to Corbin's Park from Russia and the Black Forest of Germany to stock the game preserve of financier and Robber Baron Austin Corbin. (Plainfield Historical Society)

Wild boar are thus accorded the same protection as a farmer's cows or sheep should they wander off onto someone else's property — they can't be gunned down.

But it's not that simple, in reality. Wild boar outside Corbin's Park are animals hardly anybody wants around. Only continuous hunting pressure has reduced what had been a growing invasive nuisance population down to almost nil. Farmers bore the brunt of wild boar depredations back in the 1940s and '50s as the animals destroyed growing corn, dug up potatoes and gardens and ripped open swaths of pastureland as they rooted for grubs in the soil.

Today, the park is perfectly happy to have boar outside its confines hunted down and eliminated. But poachers occasionally break through the park's fence and shoot its boar, so the attorney general's edict gives wildlife authorities a tool to differentiate between a poached pig and legal free-ranging pigs. Got a dead boar in the back of your pickup, where did you kill it? If the park said you're OK with it, no worry. If not, maybe you snipped a hole in the park fence, snuck in and felled a critter.



A tame wild boar follows Corbin's Park naturalist Ernest Harold Baynes in a meadow inside the park, circa 1907. (Plainfield Historical Society)

The physical appearance of wild boar generates little affection. They have thick necks and tall shoulders, and their back line slopes sharply downward to the rump and to a long snout. As they mature, they grow menacing-looking tusks from their lower jaws.

Wild boar found their way onto the Upper Valley landscape when the great New England hurricane of 1938 knocked down sections of the Corbin's Park fence and some of the animals escaped. Wild boar had been brought from Russia and the Black Forest of Germany by Austin Corbin, a notorious late 19th century financier and Robber Baron. He wanted a private game preserve and he chose to establish it next to his old hometown of Newport.

His agents acquired abandoned farms and woodlands for as little as pennies an acre. Eventually, his park grew to some 24,000 acres, which he surrounded with a 12-foot fence running 36 miles. He introduced various non-native species such as bison, bighorn sheep, antelope and elk in addition to wild boar, and luminaries such as Teddy Roosevelt and the Prince of Wales came by to see the conglomeration of exotic wildlife. Corbin himself came to an untimely end when a runaway team cast him out of his phaeton into a stonewall. Eventually the park became as it is today, a private preserve, held by about 30 wealthy and secretive shareholders.



Game Warden Robert Brooks holds the 100-pound wild boar struck by a car on Route 4 in Quechee, Vt., on Saturday night, March 14, 1981. The boar, probably an escapee from Corbin's Park in Cornish, N.H., has been seen in the Quechee area by several people over the past few months, most of whom mistook it for a bear. TOM WOLFE / Valley News

Soon after the Hurricane of '38, the escaped wild boar began making their presence felt in the towns surrounding the park: Cornish, Plainfield, Grantham, Croydon and Newport. Hunters were happy to have a new species for quarry, and farmers were apt to celebrate any fresh reports of a kill.

By 1947, Plainfield was considering offering a bounty of \$40 (\$500 today) for each boar killed, but hunters seemed to be gaining ground on the population and the idea went nowhere. Park employees worked furiously to repair the fence and seal off escape routes for the boar. But then came the great Grantham Mountain Forest Fire in the summer of 1953 and when the fence was breached repeatedly to allow firefighters and equipment access, a fresh stock of boar was headed out into the countryside.

The towns immediately surrounding the park, especially those on its west flank, were prime habitat of escapers, but their range would expand steadily to as far north as Lancaster, N.H., in Coos County, over much of Grafton County and into western Merrimack, and south toward Cheshire. A few boar managed to cross the Connecticut River and over the ensuing years they had reached as far as Tunbridge and into Weathersfield, where one was struck by a car on Interstate 91 one dark night.

Down through the years, it's always been the same: Boars are known to be around, but they're wily critters and hard to spot, a challenge for even the most skilled hunter. But any sighting or signs of the presence of boar can excite those riflemen like no other species.



Arnold Moulton, of Croydon, N.H., feeds his wild boar Unkie acorns and butternuts on Oct. 18, 1984. Moulton and his wife were cited by the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department for keeping a wild animal on their property without a permit and the animal should be returned to Corbin's Park. In a court case, a judge said state law does not differentiate between a wild animal raised in captivity, as in a zoo, and a wild animal raised as a domestic pet. Unkie was allowed to stay on the Moultons' property. TOM WOLFE / Valley News

Fred Sullivan, 87, is a retired Cornish Flat dairyman who has dealt with wild boar since boyhood.

"I've shot a lot of them and my father did too," Sullivan recalls. "Father would send me into the cornfields pounding on a pie plate to chase 'em out so he could get a shot."

Sullivan remembers when Jesse Scott, the state game warden in the area, would come around to catch up on wild boar activities and hear how the Sullivans were making out hunting the animals down. "He'd say, you know you're not supposed to hunt at night. We'd say, 'We gotta protect our crops'. He'd say, 'Don't let me catch you' and off he'd go."

A group of Claremont farmers once became so exasperated with wild boar damage that they brought a lawsuit against Corbin's Park. The Sullivans were invited to join the action, but they declined.

"We don't sue people. We work things out. The farm was right next to the park, and I have to say they've always tried to do a good job."

The biggest boar ever shot on the Sullivan farm weighed 350 pounds. What about all that meat? “You want young pigs or females. The meat from old males, you cook it up, it still tastes and smells like piss.”

Lebanon fruit and maple farmer Matt Patch attests to the decline in the wild boar population around the Upper Valley.

“I haven’t shot one up here at the farm in 10 or 15 years. Used to be we’d see them come out in the fields, there’d be one or two of them, sometimes more, maybe a sow with some little ones,” Patch said.

He recalls cooking up wild boar meat and, like Fred Sullivan, he’d steer clear of cuts from a mature male animal. But done right, the meat can be tender and tasty. He once had some bellies cured and they made nice bacon, he noted.

As heavy pressure from hunters continued following the forest fire era, Corbin’s Park was putting great effort into its circumferential fence to keep its resident critters inside.

Fencing was buried 3 feet down to prevent burrowing by the animals. Feeding stations were established within the park to nourish the wild boar with grain in an effort to convince the animals they were better off staying put.

Between continuous impact of the hunters and the steps taken by the park management, the population of wild boar roaming at large in the Upper Valley has declined sharply over the past 20 years. Sightings of the animals are increasingly rare, and evidence of their presence in the form of torn-up sod and dirt disturbance has become similarly unusual.

But the region remains on the U.S. Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services’ national map of wild porcine infestation. The major concentrations are spread across the Southern states where the animals are creating worsening problems for agricultural production and the environment. Texas has a population estimated at 3 million and other neighboring states have numbers in the hundreds of thousands. There are infestations now being tracked in 30 states.

It’s important to note that the Corbin’s Park wild boar are only cousins of the pigs multiplying and ravaging broad areas down south. Those Dixie animals are domesticated hogs that have gotten away from captivity and become feral. They have enormous rates of fertility — one wild sow can drop two litters of a dozen piglets each in a year, and there are no natural predators that can help check the expansion of pig numbers.

USDA, state agencies and farmers try various strategies to “remove” feral pigs, including trapping, hunting and even helicopters that fly low to flush the animals out of swamps so they can be picked off by marksmen in the air.

Mary Kronenwetter, a Grantham-based historian who has studied the long saga of Austin Corbin and his game park, writes of the contrast between boar hunting in Corbin’s time and today. “In the early years at the park, the boar were hunted on horseback with javelins and Austrian boarsetter dogs. Today, high-powered rifles are the weapon of choice.”

So will those riflemen who still hunt wild boar outside the park make sure to get the okay from park headquarters before they pull the trigger? Time’ll tell.