

Native Prairie Speaker Series

Title: Wildlife Research During a Global Quarantine: Tracking the Rapid Spread of Invasive Wild Pigs in Canada

Speaker:

Dr. Ryan K. Brook, Associate Professor, University of Saskatchewan,
Indigenous Land Management Institute & Department of Animal and Poultry Science,
College of Agriculture and Bioresources

Presentation Summary:

The entire notion of wildlife research has changed during the ongoing global quarantine caused by covid-19 which has caused virtually all fieldwork to pause indefinitely. However, the use of citizen science and deep diving into existing research data provides some opportunities to generate new insights. During this presentation I will discuss options that we are exploring to keep some research active. Free-ranging wild pigs are a global problem across all continents except Antarctica. They are not native to North America but were introduced to Canada in the 1980s as domestic stock that were released or escaped at numerous points across the country and became established in the wild. These 'wild pigs' include a complex mix of (1) true Eurasian Wild Boar, (2) feral domestic pigs, (3) hybrids of #1 and #2, and (4) pot-bellied pigs that are all in the same species *Sus scrofa*. Occurrences of wild pigs were rare in 1990's but have increased exponentially during the last decade, especially in the three Prairie Provinces, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. The current distribution has been relatively limited on grasslands currently but wild pigs are well known to thrive in these ecosystems and cause significant impacts. Wild pigs currently occupy 800,000 km² across Canada and are expanding their range at >90,000 km² each year and have been predicted to occupy one million square kilometers by the end of 2020. Wild pigs are a rooting species, tearing up the ground, eating roots and insect larvae, disturbing ecosystem function and creating opportunities for invasive species spread. They may function as vectors for disease that may affect pets, humans, livestock, and wildlife. Wild pigs eat almost anything and can impact species at risk efforts and disrupt populations across most taxa. Preventing the rapid spread of wild pigs into grassland systems and mitigating impacts will require intensive monitoring, ecological research and development of science-based management plans.

About Dr. Book:

Dr. Ryan Brook is an Associate Professor in the College of Agriculture and Bioresources at the University of Saskatchewan. He is the theme leader for Aboriginal Peoples and the Environment in the Indigenous Land Management Institute, professor in the department of Animal and Poultry Science, as well as being cross appointed to the School of Environment and Sustainability and adjunct professor at the University of Manitoba. Raised on a farm near Winnipeg, he did his undergrad, masters, and PhD at University of Manitoba and his postdoc in caribou health at the University of Calgary Faculty of Veterinary Medicine. His group the 'Wildlife Ecology and Community Engagement' (WECE, pronounced 'we see') works primarily on issues at the wildlife-livestock interface on the Canadian Prairies in collaboration with Rural and Indigenous People, but we have side hustles in the arctic and jungles of Sri Lanka. Like all people born in Manitoba, Ryan always has his left turn signal on at all times no matter what.

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