

Feral Pigs & Anarchy in Hawaii

Bjørn Olson

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It's an hour before sunset and I am sitting between two spindly coffee trees with a larger tree stump in front for a blind to partially hide behind. The brim of my grass hat is pulled low to block a pin hole of sunlight that beams through the canopy of a tall mango tree. Leaves rustle in the breeze blowing up the hill from the ocean a thousand feet below.

I am at the edge, the western border, of my family's coffee and fruit farm in Hawaii. It's the least managed and unkempt area, what the permaculturists call Zone 5. Beyond, everything is feral—the plants, the birds, the animals.

Every species that I can see has been introduced by humans and yet it is all wild and free—undomesticated. I have come here to listen to the jungle wind down for the day, to calm my mind, to meditate. Resting on my lap is a .38 caliber lever action rifle. I am also here to hunt feral pigs.

A pair of Kalij pheasants follow one another and half-heartedly peck at the ground. The male is dark black and bluish grey with a shocking patch of crimson red around its face. They go about their business, meandering through the uneven row of banana stalks pecking the ground as they go.

Brought to Hawaii in 1962 as game birds, the pheasants escaped and found their niche on this garden island in the middle of the Pacific. After a few more nibbles, they take flight directly above and prepare to bed down for the night in an old growth mango tree. They rustle for a few minutes in their branch and then all is quiet again.

The feral pigs preceded the pheasants by over a thousand years. The ancient, sea voyaging Polynesians brought the first pigs to Hawaii on their canoes. These people also brought chickens, taro, sweet potato, and a whole host of edible and utilitarian plants to cultivate on the nearly-life-devoid areas of the volcanic islands. These ancient Hawaiians brought with them a highly stratified, resource-intensifying culture with horticultural knowledge of how to terraform and cultivate.

For over a thousand years, the pigs remained domesticates. The highly favored protein sources of the ancient Hawaiians remained constrained to the curated sanctuaries—well-fed and tended, fattened for slaughter.

I hear a squeal in the tall cane grass field just a few hundred feet ahead of me. The sun has set but there is still a half an hour of twilight to see by. They are coming. I raise up on one knee to peer over an old, crumbling rock wall. I rest my rifle on a stone, peer down my iron sights and wait.

In a paper titled, *Pigs in Hawaii, from Traditional to Modern*, the authors state that “Captain Cook brought European pigs during his first voyage to Hawaii, and many other introductions of European and Asian swine followed.

“As feral pig populations grew on all islands, they began ranging more freely in the forests. Omnivorous and without any non-human predators, pigs began to thrive in the native forests and successfully established large populations. Within only a few generations, any escaped domesticated pigs reverted to a feral form, retaining the large body size of European swine, but severing their dependence on human beings.”

Severed dependence from human beings, going feral, escaping captivity, systems of dominance, and being free is the sweet music of anarchy—the beautiful idea—that is never far from my mind, and what I am striving for in

my own life. These pigs, the jungle cats, the parrots, and many of the plants in this corner of the world figured out how to escape the maze. I love and cherish the pigs for what they are and for what they represent.

An all-black, medium-sized female emerges from the cane grass. She boldly walks into the open, sniffing the ground for fallen mangoes and earthworms. I pull the lever back on my rifle and still my breathing. The afternoon sea breeze is in my favor, and she does not smell or see me. There is just enough remaining twilight to see my forward sight and I train it on a spot just behind her ear. I squeeze the trigger, and she drops without a sound. Perfect.

The small-holding, commercial farmers in this region despise the pigs for the damage and erosion they can cause. The pigs interfere with the market and in a market-driven society this is an injustice that cannot stand. Humans grant themselves extraordinary privilege to tear up, modify and destroy the land-base. Observing these traits in other species, however, causes anger and outrage.

Thinking like an ecosystem is the mantra I repeat in my mind throughout the days I work on our farm. Who needs water? What needs more light, to be pruned, pulled or replaced? Can I get from one patch of land to another without disturbing the beautiful spider's webs? Can I plant things that improve life for the other species who also call these five-acres their home—the worms, the bees, the butterflies, the birds?

On my morning walks I am often dismayed to discover new pig damage, which often takes hours or sometimes days to repair. In other instances, however, the pigs uproot and overturn heavily overgrown areas, break up the soil, add their piss and shit fertilizers, and improve areas; work that would take me days, they accomplish in one quick raid. For good or bad, the pigs are part of this novel ecosystem, and I want to learn to live with them rather than despise them.

In Tyson Yunkaporta's book, *Sand Talk*, he elaborates on what the original instructions were for pre-civilized, undomesticated human beings. We are a custodial species. Our unique consciousness allows us to project, to imagine the future and the outcomes our actions can have. Our evolutionary gift is to use this intelligence to serve our interests while also being mindful of the interrelated dependencies of all the other lifeforms we share this planet with.

On our small, family farm we help to grow the coffee, the fruit, macadamia nuts, avocado trees, a vegetable garden, herbs, and a whole host of ornamental plants. I cherish and admire them all, but the food resource I value most is the rich, succulent and nutrient-dense feral pig. Nothing we cultivate comes close to matching this meat and fat.

Wild and feral pigs have all of the essential nutrition (essential amino acids, fatty acids, vitamins, and minerals) that humans need in order to avoid deficiencies—a superfood that nourishes our bodies and brains.

In our globalized, energy and resource hungry society, sustainability is a logical fallacy. Perpetual growth, it has been said, is the ideology of a cancer cell. This technological, industrial civilization also fosters no meaningful relationships with the resources we consume. We are longing for connection and a sense of belonging, the very things civilization and capitalism have stolen. Connection and purpose have been replaced with competition, individualism, dualism, consumerism, and a whole host of entertaining distractions, psychotherapists, and drugs to drown our sorrows in.

Nothing has taught me more about the concept of custodianship than taking my turn three months a year tending to my family's five-acre farmstead. Learning to cultivate things that are good not merely for me and my family but also the other-than-humans who live here, who deserve to eat and thrive as well. Our health and well-being are bound to theirs. This is a relationship, not a transaction.

After I finish butchering the pig, I dig a hole in the garden bed. I place the skin, guts and the head inside and cover it over with a couple feet of loamy dirt. In a few week's time I will transplant sweet potatoes in this spot. The potatoes will love and devour the nitrogen and other nutrients from the pig carcass in the ceaseless cycle of life and death and more life.

The following evening my family and I gather around the deep-dish cast-iron pot and begin serving dinner. French winemakers have a word that defines a region's unique flavor. The word is *terroir*. This meat has tremendous *terroir*: the macadamia nuts, the volcanic soil, the avocado, the rain, and the wild spirit. All of this and more is in each succulent bite.

This meal is much more than mere constituents, flavor and essential nutrients, it's a sacrament to the land, to freedom, to anarchy. I am seeking my own path out of the maze, out of domestication, and into a primal embrace of an unmediated life. The pigs, the jungle cats, and all the undomesticated plants and animals on and around these five acres remind me that anarchy is not only possible, it's desirable.

Bjørn Olson is a Homer, Alaska-based filmmaker, photographer, freelance writer, anarchist, wilderness adventurer and environmental activist. He was born in an abandoned trapper's cabin in interior Alaska. He has dedicated his life to exploring far-flung corners of the state by human-power and documenting his experiences.



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