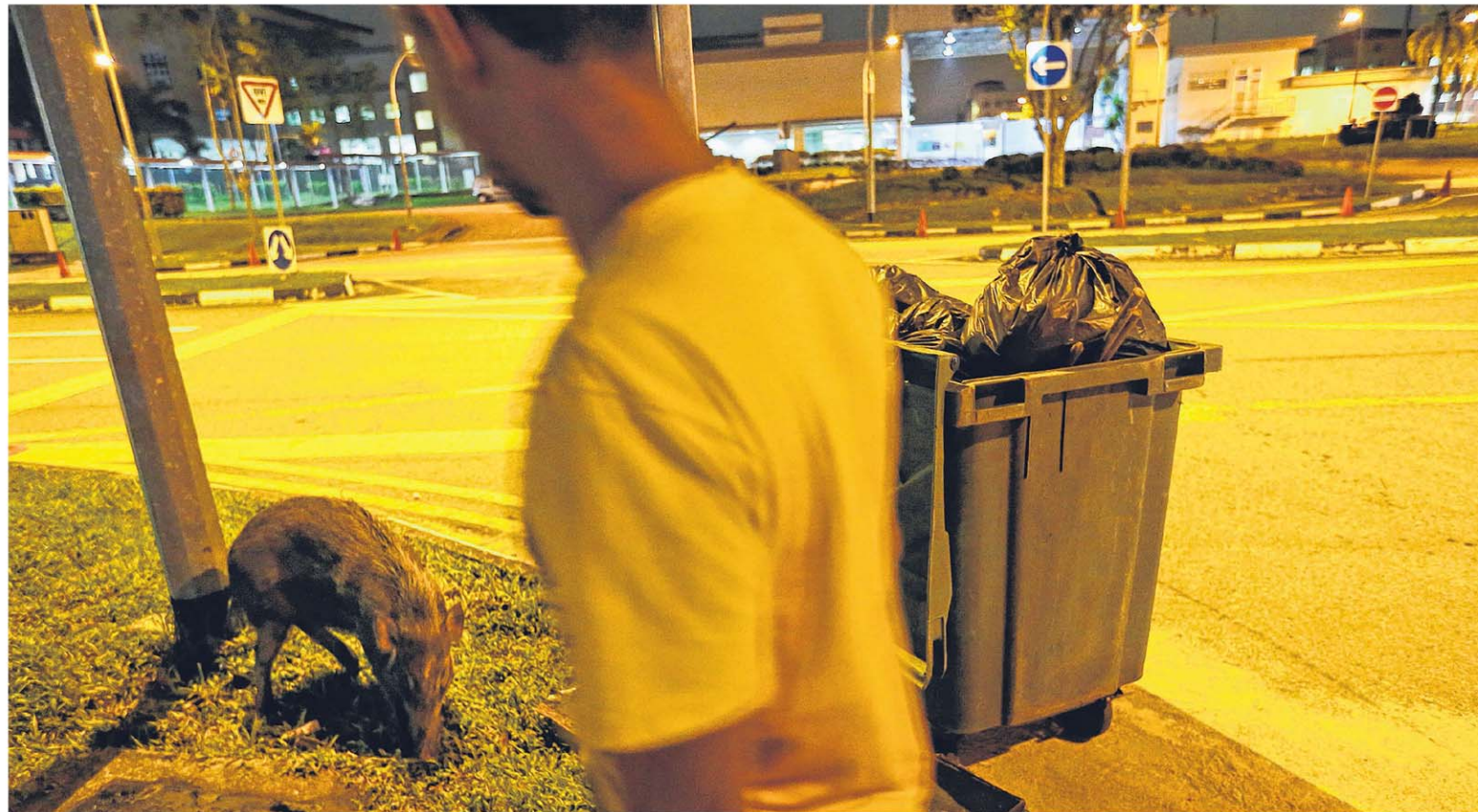




Above: A signboard at Windsor Nature Park advising people on what to do if they encounter a wild boar.

Right: A boar foraging for food off Choa Chu Kang Road last year. The study that NParks may conduct would look at how far the pigs move in search of food, population densities, family size and reproduction rates. ST FILE PHOTOS



# NParks exploring study of wild boars islandwide

It comes after NUS research shows 2016 population size in reserve was lower than that used to justify 2012 culling

**Audrey Tan**  
Environment Correspondent

An islandwide study of wild boars could be on the cards, to guide the National Parks Board (NParks) on how best to manage populations of the animal in the future, *The Straits Times* has learnt.

The agency's study would look at how far the pigs move in search of food, population densities, family size and reproduction rates, ac-

ording to Mr James Gan, director of NParks' National Biodiversity Centre.

"This research will help guide NParks in considering the best options to manage populations and population densities," he said.

Mr Gan was responding to queries from *The Straits Times*, following a separate study published last month on the wild boar population size in the Central Catchment Nature Reserve.

The study by National University

of Singapore (NUS) researcher Joshua Koh found that in 2016, there were just 163 boars in the reserve, with an average of about 1.6 pigs found per sq km.

The findings – published in scientific journal *Raffles Bulletin of Zoology* – are lower than the figures used to justify NParks' controversial culling of 80 boars within the Lower Peirce area of the reserve in 2012.

Back then, NParks estimated that there were 80 to 100 wild boars within the 1.5 sq km Lower Peirce area of the reserve alone. This translated to a population density of 53.3 boars per sq km.

It also said then that, based on studies done in other countries,

there should be no more than seven boars there in a balanced ecosystem. A culling exercise was carried out to reduce damage to the forest due to the foraging activities of wild boars.

However, the findings from the NUS study, which was done using camera traps, location tags and computer models, appeared to contradict earlier estimates.

Wildlife conservationist Ong Say Lin said it was difficult to conclude whether the low population density in the latest study could be attributed to the 2012 culling. One reason could be a lack of scientific knowledge before the culling was done.

NParks' Mr Gan said that prior to the exercise in 2012, all estimates of the population size in the reserve were based on visual observations and videos or photographs.

The latest study may have found that the number of wild pigs per unit area in the Central Catchment Nature Reserve is low – but it does not mean the animals would not venture out of the forest occasionally in search of resources or due to habitat disturbance, said Mr Ong.

He added: "An effective approach to managing human-wildlife conflict requires science-backed, holis-

tic measures such as the concurrent erecting of physical barriers, avoiding planting shrubs that wild boars are known to consume, or educating people on how to react when faced with a wild pig."

Singapore's need to manage its animal populations has come under the spotlight recently, as the Republic's greening efforts take hold. With urban areas becoming more conducive for animals, more human-wildlife encounters – including those with wild boars – have been reported. Yet, culling as a method has stirred controversy.

Mr Gan said: "As the lead agency in nature conservation, NParks adopts a scientific approach to our wildlife management, where studies are carried out to understand the population ecology of animals better." He cited the islandwide study of wild boars that NParks is looking into conducting as an example.

However, culling is not being ruled out as a population control method. "These (management) options may include habitat modifications to reduce the availability of food sources, sterilisation or culling," said Mr Gan.

audreyt@sph.com.sg