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Roaming swine is a cagy quarry

Sunset Park residents are desperate to catch a pig that is tearing up the neighborhood. So far, the elusive porker is winning.

By KEVIN GRAHAM

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TAMPA - Residents along San Jose Street in Sunset Park have a ham of a problem on their hands. For four weeks, a pig has plucked up their prized flower beds and plowed through their precious South Tampa lawns.

The fugitive even managed to outrun a couple of police cars, neighbors said.

This week, the animal rights group Florida Voices for Animals joined the fight to finally send the porker packing.

"He's so smart and so quick," said Jim Gisondi, a board member. "It's definitely the pig vs. the monkey, here. We're gonna get him."

Gisondi and fellow animal activist John Moyer spent three hours Monday night trying to trap the pig with a large net. They stayed until about midnight, then returned Tuesday about 2 p.m.

"He can probably smell them coming," said Marlin Anderson, 52, an accountant who has a trap in his front yard. He said if anyone gets close to the pig, it takes off. And it's so cunning, it manages to eat dried corn kernels inside the cage without triggering the trapping device.

"I just want the pig to be gone," Anderson said.

If only it were so easy.

Three weeks ago, two men from Town 'N Country trampled through the mangroves, where the pig hides out, with a lasso. They had no luck. Anderson said he's watched police officers chase the pig in their cruisers. Once, when they had it cornered, the pig jumped a wall and escaped, Anderson said.

To compound the problem, there may be two pigs instead of one. Apparently, Anderson's daughter saw them both at once recently. And Anderson recalled the first time he tried to take a picture of the pig. He described it as white with a black band around its midsection. Noise from the first click of the camera shutter sent the pig grunting away.

When the menace returned Friday, Anderson reached for the camera again. The windy night drowned out the camera's noise, and Anderson snapped an entire roll of film. This time, the suspect was a black pig with a white band around its midsection, the opposite pattern of the first. And it looked as if it had gained weight. Last week, neighbors put the pig's weight at 50 pounds. Anderson said Tuesday it weighed 75 pounds.

"If we don't catch the pigs and then they start breeding ... we're in the wrong environment for that," Anderson said.

Gisoni and Moyer stood Tuesday at the edge of mangroves abutting Old Tampa Bay, part of a Florida Audubon Society wildlife sanctuary, and discussed their plan of attack. Moyer had decided to buy some apples to draw the pig out of the brush.

Neighbors of the Sunset Park community offered their support as they drove by. One woman brought the men cups of ice and orange juice. Another offered her driveway as a parking lot for the trappers' vehicles.

If Gisoni and Moyer manage to snag the pig, or pigs, an animal sanctuary in Watkins Glen, N.Y., has agreed to take them.

"We want to do that pig some justice," Moyer said, "so he can live out his years in relative peace."

- Kevin Graham can be reached at 226-3433 or at kgraham@sptimes.com

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