

“Hava You Seena Those Wild Javelina?”

By: Sherry E Engler

“Very, very ugly.” “Very, very cute.” “So very ugly, they are cute” are some of the descriptions I received when conducting a poll on “How would you describe javelina?” This (sort of) scientific poll I conducted with friends and family continued with the question, “Do you like javelina?” Here are some of the responses from residents of Rim Country:

“Yes, they are soooo cute and adorably ugly. I love watching them run through the neighbor’s yard.”

“No, I hate them with a passion. Those dang ugly varmints eat all the plants in my yard and then I hear my neighbors laughing hysterically when I scream uncontrollably at them.”

“The javelina do not bother me one way or another. Let them be free. Let them live among us in harmony.”

But perhaps the most entertaining story I heard was from an old, old cowboy (to protect the innocent we will call him Cowboy TallTale) who worked “cowboying” around “these here parts” when he was just a youngster, gathering up cattle near Young. Apparently, one day on the range, some tourists ask him, “Hava you seena those wild javelina?” Deciding to be “obliging to the newcomers,” Cowboy TallTale decided to find a javelina, rope it and take it to show the tourists so they would know what “javelina are all about.” Well, apparently, he found out what javelina were all about when he rode up on a herd of javelina, executed the roping of the biggest in the herd, only to realize that “javelina have lots and lots of fight in them!” According to him, the roped javelina threw such a fit, squealing, trying to jab tusks into his horse, and jumping up at his leg trying to attack him that his horse “went a-bucking and a-kicking” and that horse kicked so high in the air, Cowboy TallTale lost consciousness, only to wake up hours later with his faithful horse standing nearby and those dang javelina “Gone! Gone! Gone!” and with his good roping rope! If one is of a mind to believe Cowboy TallTale, he is still deathly afraid of them to this day.

Javelina or *Tayassu tajacu* are peculiar little pig creatures peppered with wiry-like black, gray and brown hair with a lighter band of hair around the shoulders giving the appearance of a collar. Thus, in Rim Country, it is the collared peccary which roams about in herds between eight and fifteen javelina, usually ranging in different ages. These “cute but ugly little pigs” roam not only in desert terrain and woodland grasses but are also known to roam about neighborhoods inhabited by humans in the southwestern United States. The javelina is considered a peccary, an animal of medium size similar in appearance to the pig, with a cartilaginous snout and eyes small compared with head size. Rim Country javelina are approximately two feet tall, with a length of three to four feet, weighing between 35 and 55 pounds. They have short, straight tusks which protrude approximately one inch from the jaw. This characteristic helps the javelina obtain food by crushing seeds and rooting up plant roots. The tusks are also used to deter predators such as the coyote, mountain lion and bobcat as the javelina will often make a chattering noise by rubbing their tusks together as a warning to stay away. The javelina will also make a grunting or growling noise when provoked or, according to Cowboy TallTale, will squeal “like a squeal you will never want to hear again.”

Some interesting facts about the javelina are that they have strong complex stomachs with three chambers for processing foods like prickly pear cactus which is one of their favorite foods. They also like to eat roots, a variety of grasses, seeds, fruits and sometimes vegetation and flowers grown and cultivated by Rim Country humans. If necessary, javelina will eat small rodents, dead birds, lizards and insects. In retrospect, I guess we are lucky they didn’t feel the necessity to eat Cowboy TallTale. These peccaries

reproduce year round but mainly give birth between November and March. The mama javelina usually gives birth to two or three piglets at a time. These piglets are red in color, earning the name of “Reds” until about three months when the piglets change to the peppered black, gray, and brown coat. Javelina are most active at night, perhaps foraging through a garbage dumpster or two. They have very poor eyesight but a very keen sense of smell. (Maybe it was Cowboy TallTale’s smell that protected him.)

In captivity, javelina have been noted to live up to twenty-five years; however, in the wild, their average lifespan is approximately seven and a half years. As mentioned earlier, javelina run in herds usually numbering eight to fifteen peccaries. So, in my very scientific research, I asked the question of friends and family: “If you were a javelina, how would you know to which herd you belong?” Here are some very fascinating answers:

“Pick out the plump ones and hang with them. They know where the good food is.”

“Look at their little cute faces and whichever group of them looks like they are smiling, go with them. They must be the happiest.”

“See if some are grunting with aggression. If they are, go with that group because they will protect you.”

While these answers are intriguing, there is a scientific explanation of which javelina pigs “hang” with which herd. These small pig-like creatures have scent glands below each eye and on their backs. They secrete a unique smell and rub on each other which identifies the members of the herd. They also mark their territory by rubbing their scent on it. Because of this peculiar smell, (some say it is pungent), javelina have acquired the names of “musk hog” and “skunk pig”.

“Homely,” “pesty,” “stinky” were additional adjectives used by participants in my polling. But honestly, when I look at javelina, whether into mischief or running for cover, I smile. God blessed us richly in Rim Country and to me, even though these mischievous, thieving little creatures sometimes cause havoc by being naughty, naughty, naughty, they are rather adorable.

As you and yours travel into summer adventures, be safe and enjoy! God Bless and Godspeed. Just a cautionary note: If visitors ask you, “Hava you seena those wild javelina?”, I would caution you NOT to rope one.