

Farrowing and Savaging in Farmed Wild Boar

Moira J. Harris¹, Renée Bergeron² and Harold W. Gonyou¹

¹Prairie Swine Centre Inc., P.O. Box 21057, 2105 8th St. East, Saskatoon, SK, S7H 5N9 and ²Université Laval, Département des sciences animales, Pavillon Comtois, Ste-Foy, Quebec, G1K 7P4

Little is known about the maternal behaviour of wild boar kept in captivity. Twenty-four first parity wild boar, of three lines (PK = Peter Kalder; SD = San Diego; S = Scandinavian), were videotaped during farrowing. Records were kept of gestation length, litter size, sex ratio and weight, and sow weight before farrowing. The duration of each farrowing and inter-birth interval (interval between births of successive piglets), posture of sows during births, number of posture changes during farrowing and any aggression displayed by the mother towards the piglets were noted during videotape analysis. Aggression was scored as 0 (none) 1 (moderate aggression) or 2 (severe aggression).

Eight sows (33.3%) showed some aggression towards their piglets during or immediately after farrowing. Analysis of variance was performed to determine whether sows with different aggression scores differed in other features. Aggression score varied with sow line: SD sows were more aggressive (average score = 1.13) than either PK or S (average score = 0.13). Litters of sows with an aggression score of 1 were more male-biased (75% were all-male) than those of sows scoring either 0 or 2. Farrowing was of greater average duration for sows scoring 2 (211.8 mins) than sows scoring either 0 or 1 (54.4 mins). Similarly, sows scoring 2 had longer average inter-birth intervals (51.6 mins) than those scoring either 0 or 1 (12.9 mins). Sows scoring 2 changed posture more often on average during farrowing (65.8 changes) than those scoring 0 or 1 (7.6 changes). Partial correlations determined after adjusting for genotype supported the previous findings: aggression score was significantly correlated with duration of farrowing (+.63), inter-birth interval (+.51) and number of posture changes during farrowing (+.48).

Implications:

Factors associated with piglet-directed aggression in wild boar may also be implicated in savaging in domestic sows. Further research is needed to elicit the reasons for savaging, and for the associated long farrowings involving multiple posture changes.