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20 June 2016

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

WILD HOGS PROMOTE AN INVASIVE PLANT – IS IT FARMING?

In a new study just published in the journal *Ecology and Evolution*, ecologists at the University of the South document a positive interaction—resembling farming—between two invasive species. This type of interaction between invasive species is likely to become more common as invasive species spread throughout the world, creating novel ecosystems.

Yellow nutsedge (*Cyperus esculentus*) is a weedy, invasive plant that is common worldwide. Wild hogs (*Sus scrofa*) forage for underground plant parts by disturbing the soil surface. Wild hog foraging on St. Catherines Island, Georgia, has been found to promote the density of yellow nutsedge, a clonal plant that can rapidly grow in a disturbed environment through underground tubers.

The authors suggest that this is the first reported instance of a farming-like interaction between a mammal and a plant. When wild hogs forage on yellow nutsedge, they remove other plant competition, allowing yellow nutsedge to increase in density. Because wild hogs return to the same sites to forage, they are, in a way, tending their crop. Interestingly, yellow nutsedge is thought to be one of the first agricultural crops domesticated by humans.

“The interaction between wild hogs and yellow nutsedge resembles other low-level farming interactions, where an animal’s disturbance promotes another species and leads to mutual benefit,” first-author Callie Oldfield comments.

In this 12-year study, researchers found that wild hogs return to the same forage sites roughly every five years, resulting in new soil disturbance that maintains the yellow nutsedge.

St. Catherines Island is a barrier island located on the coast of Georgia. Like many barrier islands along the southeastern coast, St. Catherines has a long history of prehistoric and historic land use. Wild hogs were brought to the island in the 1930s as livestock, and subsequently became feral.

See the full study here: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/ece3.2045/full>