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Mystery of radioactivity of Germany's wild boars – 4th September 2023

Level 4

Radioactive wild boars have lived in German forests for decades. Scientists said their radioactivity was from the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster. However, other animals are not as radioactive. They do not have as much radioactive caesium in their bodies. This has puzzled scientists. They dubbed this mystery the "wild boar paradox". They say the wild boars' radioactivity is from nuclear weapons tests from last century.

Scientists believe wild boars are radioactive because of their love of truffles. These absorb caesium particles in the ground. The levels of caesium in boars mean they cannot be eaten. This has led to a reduction in the hunting of the animals and an increase in their numbers. A geochemist said he doesn't know why the effects of nuclear weapons testing on the environment has been "largely forgotten". He said soil pollution will "haunt generations to come".

Level 5

Radioactive wild boars have roamed the forests of Germany for decades. Scientists believed their radioactivity is from the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster. However, other animals are not as radioactive. Levels of radioactive caesium decreased over the years in other creatures. This has puzzled scientists because radioactivity in wild boars is at high levels. Scientists dubbed this mystery the "wild boar paradox". Research says the contamination of the wild boars is from nuclear weapons tests last century. The Chernobyl caesium has a much shorter life than that in nuclear weapons.

Scientists believe wild boars have remained so radioactive because of their love of truffle mushrooms. Radioactive particles accumulate in these underground fungi, which the boars eat. The levels of caesium in boars make the animals too dangerous to be eaten. This has led to a reduction in the hunting of the animals and a proliferation of their numbers. A geochemist asked why the effects of nuclear weapons testing on the environment has been "under-studied and largely forgotten". He said caesium soil pollution will "haunt generations to come".

Level 6

Radioactive wild boars have been roaming the forests of Germany for decades. Scientists believed their radioactivity was due to the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster. However, the animals' radioactivity has long mystified scientists because while levels of radioactive caesium in other animals has decreased over the years, radioactivity in wild boars has persisted at high levels. Scientists have dubbed this mystery the "wild boar paradox". New research now attributes the contamination of Germany's wild boars to nuclear weapons tests from the mid-20th century. The Chernobyl reactor produced caesium-137, which has a much shorter life than the caesium-135 created by nuclear weapons.

Scientists believe the reason wild boars have remained so radioactive compared to other forest creatures is their love of the delicacy truffle mushrooms. Radioactive particles accumulate in these underground fungi, which form part of the boars' diet. The high levels of caesium in boars make the animals too dangerous to be eaten under German law. This has resulted in a reduction in the hunting of the animals, which has led to a proliferation of their numbers. Geochemist James Kaste asks why the effects of nuclear weapons testing on the environment have been "under-studied and largely forgotten". He said: "This is one of the ultimate case studies showing how legacy soil pollution can haunt generations to come."