



# Wildlife Notes

## Armadillo (*Dasyus novemcinctus*)

### An American Native

Turtle-rabbit (*āyōtōchtli*) in Nahuatl, the ancient language of the Aztec, this strange relative of the anteater and sloth was named 'armadillo' (*little armored one*) by Spanish conquistadors and colonials.

A native of the western hemisphere, twenty different species are found in South and Central America, but only one species, the nine-banded armadillo (*Dasyus novemcinctus*), lives in North America. Its habitat extends throughout the southern United States.

Adults measure up to three feet in length and weigh 10–17 pounds. Some South American relatives measure more than four feet and weigh over 100 pounds.

### Habitat

The armadillo's wide range extends from the southeastern tip of New Mexico through Texas, Oklahoma, southeastern Kansas, southwestern Missouri, Arkansas, southwestern Mississippi, southern Alabama, Georgia and most of Florida.

Armadillos prefer dense brush, woodlands, forests and areas adjacent to creeks and rivers. Preferring sandy or loam soils that are loose and porous, armadillos will inhabit areas where cracks, crevices and rocks provide suitable burrows.

### Feeding

Armadillos feed both above and below ground. With powerful claws to dig and root, their underground diet includes ants and other insects, worms, grubs, centipedes and tubers. Above-ground food sources include snakes, lizards, vegetable matter and carrion. With poor eyesight, armadillos rely on hearing and smell to detect food and avoid predators. When hunting and foraging, armadillos may be oblivious to the presence of humans. Often seen foraging along roadsides at night, armadillos frequently fall victim to automobile traffic.

### Breeding

After a 150-day gestation period, females produces one litter from March–April each year. Since newborns are derived from a single ovum, the litter consists of identical quadruplets of the same sex. Young are born within the burrow and able to forage within a few hours after birth. Juveniles remain with the mother near the den until autumn when they disperse.

### Predators

Coyotes are the primary predator of armadillos, followed by bobcats, cougars, wolves, bears, raccoons and even large raptors.



The armadillo's leathery armor-like hide helps to protect them from predators, while allowing them time to scuttle away through thick, thorny brush or to dig a hole in which to hide.

Humans also eat armadillos, and in South and Central America and Mexico are often used as a substitute for pork.

## In New Mexico

Since the 1960s, armadillo sightings in New Mexico are less common, however, recent activity in the Texas Panhandle suggests pioneering individuals may be returning eastward. If you should encounter an armadillo in New Mexico, you are encouraged to photograph it and note where and when it was sighted. Such information may provide important clues to the status of this unusual animal in our state.

## Armadillo Facts

- Armadillo teeth are few and contain no enamel. Instead they have several peg-like molars.
- Like their cousin, the anteater, an armadillo has a very long, sticky tongue to catch insects and strong claws to tear open ant nests.
- A very low metabolic rate and little body fat provides a low body temperature that requires armadillos to live in warmer climates. Despite this fact, armadillos are steadily moving north.
- Armadillos are used in leprosy research. Their low body temperatures and poor immune systems allow them to contract the most virulent form of this disease.
- Newborn armadillos have soft shells (like human fingernail). As the animals grow harder bone is deposited under the skin to make a solid shell.
- In 1728, His Majesty George II, King of England, was presented an armadillo as a gift.
- In many parts of the world, including the United States, armadillo meat is on the menu.
- During the Great Depression of the 1920–30's, armadillos were nicknamed 'Hoover Hogs,' a bitter jab at the ineffective policy of then President Herbert Hoover.



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