



USFWS

## Nine-banded Armadillo

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### *Dasypus novemcinctus*

The nine-banded armadillo is a distant relative of anteaters and sloths of South America. First seen in south Texas in the mid 1800s, they migrated north and east as far as the Mississippi River. Armadillos in Alabama probably came from Florida, where populations were started from accidental releases from zoos and animals unintentionally transported from Texas by truck and rail car. Armadillos were first noted in Alabama in the 1940s. Armadillos are now found throughout the southern two-thirds of our state.

Human-armadillo conflicts usually arise from the animal's habit of digging and rooting for insect larvae and grubs in nutrient rich soils—often in lawns, flower beds or gardens. Damage is usually localized in nature.

### **Description**

Armadillos are mammals. They have hair (sparse belly hair only) and give birth to live young. The nine-banded

name comes from the nine hard, horny bands between its armored shoulders and rump. They have large, strong claws on each foot and are very good at digging for food and digging burrows. A pointed snout aids in digging. A series of bony rings covers the tail.

### **Habitat**


The northern range of the armadillo is restricted by its lack of body hair insulation. An average temperature much below freezing limits its ability to survive. Hard, clay-packed and rocky soils also limit its ability to dig for food and burrows.

Armadillos prefer shrubby or tree-covered habitat where vegetation is dense.

Typically, armadillos are usually more active at night and early morning and spend their days in deep burrows. These burrows may be located under dense brush, stumps or rock piles. The burrows may also be home to other animals.

### **Diet**

Armadillos feed mainly on animal matter. Insects, ants, spiders, termites and other invertebrates make up the majority of its diet, particularly west of the Mississippi River. Quail and turkey eggs have been documented in armadillo stomach contents, but only in a few cases. Armadillos have been known to disturb and destroy quail and turkey nests in Alabama. Most data indicated this was incidental to the animal digging and rooting for food in the area of nests and not a result of direct predation of eggs.

The miniaturization of video surveillance equipment along with infrared lighting has allowed researchers to document nocturnal predation of quail nests. An armadillo was found to be one of the nest predators caught on video. The armadillo ate the eggs without digging in the nest. Turkey nest predation has been observed in Texas with all the eggs consumed by an armadillo. Nest predation by armadillos on threatened and endangered sea turtle nests has been documented in Florida. The armadillos dug up the underground nests and ate the eggs. These behaviors are believed to be recently learned feeding habits and not instinctive. Armadillos appear to be adapting to available food sources. 

*Although it has a bony covering, the armadillo's minimal hair makes it more sensitive to cold temperatures. In hot weather the animal becomes more nocturnal and in cool weather it becomes more active during the warmest part of the day.*

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