



Nine-banded Armadillo

North Carolina Wildlife Profiles



Photo: birdphotos.com

Nine-Banded Armadillo

(*Dasypus novemcinctus*)

Armadillos are classified in the same order as anteaters and sloths, and are the only mammals that have a shell, which are hardened skin plates covering their bodies that give them an armored appearance. There are 20 species of armadillos, but only the Nine-banded Armadillo lives in the southeast US. The Nine-banded Armadillo, native to Central and South America, was first recorded in Texas in 1849, but have since expanded their range north and east, crossing the Mississippi River sometime in the early 1940's, appearing in western Tennessee in 1980 and reaching North Carolina in the late 2000s, primarily from natural dispersal from adjacent states.

Description

The Nine-banded Armadillo is a unique mammal, with its armor-like skin and long, scaly tail. It is named for the bands (range from 7-11) across its midsection. It has deer-like ears and has been nicknamed "Armored pig" for its long, pig-like snout, which it keeps to the ground to forage by smell. They often travel slowly, in an erratic, wandering pattern as they forage, and sometimes can be heard grunting like a pig. Armadillos have small, peg-like teeth that are used to mash and grind their food, capturing most of their prey with their long, sticky and flexible tongue.

History and Status

The Nine-banded Armadillo is considered abundant throughout its established range. In North Carolina, its population is still expanding and it is still relatively uncommon. It is classified as nongame, with no closed hunting season or bag limit. It can be trapped during the regulated trapping season. During the 1930s and 1940s, armadillos were given the nickname "Hoover Hog" and "Texas Turkey" because they were commonly consumed by people. Even today, people will consume armadillo meat, likening it to pork in taste and texture.

For more information on this species, including status and any applicable regulations, visit ncwildlife.org/armadillo.

Habitats and Habits

Nine-banded Armadillos originated from the tropical rainforests of Central and South America, but have adapted to living in many types of habitat, including scrubland, grasslands, pine forests, salt marshes, and deciduous forests. Golf courses, parks and cemeteries can also be suitable habitat. Their habitat needs are primarily dependent on precipitation levels and winter temperatures. Dry conditions are unsuitable, as invertebrates are their primary food source and depend on moist soils. Because they make burrows, armadillos prefer clay or sandy soils. They do not have fur or much body fat, so they are not adapted well to surviving long periods of freezing temperatures. As winter temperatures become more mild in many eastern states, expect the armadillo to expand its range northward.

The common name, armadillo, is derived from a Spanish term meaning "little armored one."



Photo: Jay Butfloski



Photo: Hans Steiglitz

Range and Distribution

The Nine-banded Armadillo is the most widespread species of armadillo, ranging from Argentina to the southeastern United States. In recent years, its range has expanded northward into North Carolina.

N.C. Confirmed or Credible Armadillo Observations 2007 through 2018



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Nine-banded Armadillos are solitary animals and mostly nocturnal, though they do forage in the daytime during cold weather. While their vision is poor, they can detect grubs, insects and other invertebrates underground by using their great sense of smell. They will dig their own burrows and an armadillo may have five to 12 burrows within their territories. In some states, armadillos have built nests resembling haystacks out of dry grass.

Their natural predators include feral hogs, dogs, black bears, coyotes, bobcats and raccoons. Armadillos protect themselves by fleeing rapidly through thick brush or through the protection afforded by their hard carapace. However, young armadillos are more susceptible to predation because their skin is soft, like a leather glove, and the hard shell develops as they age. Armadillos can also defend themselves by expelling a foul-smelling anal spray. They also use anal secretions to mark their territory. When frightened, they can jump straight up several feet, which is one reason they are more susceptible to being hit by a car. They can climb fences, but are not known to climb trees. They also can swim across water, or walk on the bottom while holding their breath. To aid in swimming, they will inflate their stomach and intestine with air to increase their buoyancy.

Human/NCWRC Interactions

As armadillos expand into North Carolina, interactions between people and armadillos will increase. While most of these interactions will be harmless and involve observations, some conflicts may occur. The most common type of damage caused by armadillos is to property as a result of their foraging and feeding habits, in which they dig shallow holes 1 to 3 inches deep and 3 to 5 inches wide. To find insects, grubs, and earthworms, they will dig into gardens, flower beds, and lawns. Their burrowing can damage tree roots and may uproot ornamental plants. Armadillos causing property damage can be trapped during the regulated trapping season (Nov. 1 through end of Feb.) or with a depredation permit. However, trapping can be ineffective due to the movement pattern of armadillos. In one study, unbaited cage traps had similar capture success as baited cage traps. To increase effectiveness, place a cage trap along pathways leading to a burrow or along a fence line. Adding wings, such as 6-foot long boards, that funnel the armadillo to the entrance of an unbaited cage trap may increase capture success. Please note it is illegal to relocate an armadillo.

Armadillos can be hunted year-round and shooting may be a more effective solution if an armadillo is causing property damage. There are no known effective repellents and poisoning is illegal and would kill other wild and domestic animals. Creating barriers around smaller areas, such as flower beds and gardens, can discourage armadillos. Leprosy has been associated with armadillos, but it is relatively uncommon, with one study showing 0% to 10% of armadillos were infected in the southeast. To reduce exposure to diseases, the Commission recommends that gloves be worn when in direct contact with any wild animal, including armadillos. When working in the garden, gloves should be worn to prevent exposure to various diseases and parasites that can persist in the soil.

References/Credits

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Wild Facts

Classification

Class: Mammalia

Order: Edentata, Xenarthra, or Cingulata

Average Size

Total Length: 2-2.6 ft (including tail)

Weight: Generally 5.5-14.3 lbs, though can be as high as 22 lbs. Males tend to weigh more than females.

Food

Mostly invertebrates (grubs, beetles, termites, fire ants and worms). The armadillo digs burrows to find food, then uses its long, sticky tongue to lap up insects. It will occasionally eat fruit, amphibians, bird eggs and other small prey.

Breeding/Young

Sexually mature at 1 year old. Breeds between June and August. Delayed implantation that can last up to four months. Give birth to identical quadruplets in March or April.

The young are born precocial, with their eyes open. They can walk within hours and can leave the nest with their mothers in about three weeks. They have soft skin at birth, which hardens as they age. The young are weaned after three to five months and leave the mother after six months to a year.

Life Expectancy

6 to 7 years in wild, up to 12 to 15 years.

The Commission is seeking observations of armadillos from the public. If you believe you observed an armadillo, please contact the NC Wildlife Helpline at 866-318-2401 or e-mail wildlifehelpline@ncwildlife.org