



Big Thicket

National Preserve
Texas

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Nine-Banded Armadillo

Dasyus novemcinctus

Armadillos are found throughout the southeastern United States and get their name from their distinctive body armor. Armadillo means “little armored one” in Spanish. While they are typically more active at night, armadillos are frequently seen during the day. Armadillos are omnivorous and eat a wide variety of invertebrates from insects to snails. They also eat eggs and small reptiles when they can get them! Armadillos do eat plant matter, but it is not as large a part of their diet as small animals are.



Insects make up the majority of an armadillo's diet.
NPS Photo / Soren George-Nichol

Armadillos' natural predators can include [coyotes](#), [bobcats](#), and alligators. However, the biggest threats to armadillos are vehicles. Armadillos' eyes don't shine in the dark the way a deer's eyes do and are frequently impossible to spot at night. They also have a defense mechanism of jumping up to three feet in the air when they feel threatened, which puts them directly in the way of most vehicles' bumpers. Despite this, armadillos are not threatened or endangered and continue to thrive throughout Texas and many other southern states. Armadillos are about the size of a large house cat and can live 7-10 years.

Did You Know?

- Armadillos are excellent swimmers who can hold their breath for up to six minutes underwater, when crossing narrow streams, they will often walk across the bottom of the stream by digging their claws into the soil instead of swimming across. For wider bodies of water, they are able to inflate their intestines to increase buoyancy and swim across!
- Armadillos get a bad reputation for carrying the bacteria that causes Hansen’s disease (commonly known as leprosy). While it’s true that some armadillos do carry the bacteria, it is extremely uncommon for it to be passed on to people. Hansen’s disease is typically spread through prolonged contact with the infected and cannot be passed on from casual contact.
- Armadillos generally give birth to identical quadruplets every year! When an armadillo gets pregnant, a single fertilized egg develops into four separate embryos which all have the same DNA.

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The armadillo is recognized as the Texas state small mammal.

NPS Photo / Cory Cravatta

Sources



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