



## **Armadillos**

**August 23, 2012**

Growing up only an hour from Florida had its benefits. We were only a few hours from the beach, you rarely ever had to worry about snow, and we were only a few hours from the beach. One of the down-sides was I quickly became experienced with the joys of dealing with armadillos. I doubt there's anything my mom still hates more than that experience of walking outside in the morning and seeing the destruction that just one armadillo could inflict on her yard.

Unfortunately, people further north are now getting to experience all the joys of dealing with the nine-banded armadillo. Armadillos are now commonly found in the Athens area and have even been seen in the Rome area. The armadillo is considered both an exotic species and a pest in Georgia. Georgia law prohibits keeping armadillos in captivity but they are not protected so they can be hunted or trapped throughout the year.

Armadillos are easily one of the most peculiar wildlife species in Georgia. No other mammal in the state has bony skin plates or "shell" and armadillos have been observed climbing fences but are also excellent swimmers and have been observed holding their breath to actually walk along the bottom of streams to cross them. Their small head, beady eyes, long tail, and hairy underbellies certainly won't win them the "cutest critter" award but they are certainly perfectly built to serve their purpose.

Armadillos dig their own burrows or use the burrow of another armadillo or natural holes. On very wet sites they have been known to build nests aboveground. They do not hibernate and also cannot tolerate temperatures above 85°F. During winter months they will be active during warmer parts of the day and during the summer will be active during cooler parts of the night. While they can remain in their burrows for several days, they do not store food or can accumulate large stores of body fat, so they must eventually emerge to forage. Because of this they could freeze or starve to death if they are unable to find food. Armadillos rely on a superb sense of smell but have poor eyesight. You could easily walk up behind or even directly towards an armadillo and it might not even see you. Armadillos use their sense of smell and long claws to forage for worms, ants, grubs, insect larvae, lizards, eggs, and fruit.

Armadillos prefer habitat near streams but will avoid excessively wet or dry areas. An individual armadillo can have 5 to 10 burrows which average 3 to 4 feet deep. Although armadillos appear to forage in an erratic pattern, they always seem to have a sense of location and will quickly escape to a nearby burrow. Armadillos have a home range from 1 to 20 acres which can fluctuate in size from summer to winter.

Although it is true that armadillos can carry human communicable diseases such as rabies and leprosy, there have been no recorded cases in Georgia and extremely rare occurrences in the Southeast. In Texas, two cases of leprosy transmission to humans were recorded but this was attributed to eating undercooked armadillo meat. A rabid armadillo was once discovered in Texas but there has been no known human rabies infection.

Trapping or shooting armadillos are the two main ways to reduce or control armadillo numbers. Wire cage traps that measure at least 10 x 12 x 32 inches are recommended. To help direct armadillos into a trap or have better success rates, use 1 x 6 wooden boards to form a "v" and funnel the armadillo towards the trap entrance and place traps in front of burrows or along natural barriers like logs or sides of buildings. Baits such as fruit or earthworms can be used but research has not shown that any particular bait is more effective or that baits largely increase trapping success. There are no repellents or poisons registered for use with armadillos but decreasing insect populations in landscapes and controlling lawn grubs could help reduce your yard's appeal. Use of a .22 caliber is effective when used safely and legally. A word of warning from personal experience, wounding an armadillo will lead to them running and jumping wildly, potentially towards you. A well-placed head shot quickly puts them down without any risk to you. While temperatures are still warm during the day, armadillos will be most likely seen foraging in the middle of the night.