

Nine-banded Armadillo

(Dasypus novemcinctus)



DID YOU KNOW:

An armadillo can cross bodies of water in two ways. He can inflate his stomach and intestines with air and float across the water or sink down, hold his breath for six minutes or so and use his sharp claws to walk across the bottom.

EATING HABITS:

Nine-banded armadillos are generally insectivores. They forage for meals by thrusting their snouts into loose soil and leaf litter, digging up their supper - grubs, beetles, ants, termites and caterpillars. Their sensitive noses can detect dinner through 8 inches of soil; they use their sticky tongues to lap up their finds. An armadillo can devour 40,000 ants (including fire ants) in a single feeding. They supplement their diet with amphibians, small reptiles, fungi, tubers and carrion.

THE YOUNG:

Almost always, Mom gives birth to identical quadruplets. The babies are born with their eyes open and fully developed. They are able to walk within a few hours after birth and forage with their mother in just a few weeks. They continue to nurse for about two months and may stay with Mom for several months after this.



HABITAT (HOME):



Armadillos may have as many as 12 individual burrows located through their range; each one can be as much as 23 feet below the ground. Burrows consist of a labyrinth of tunnels that can be nearly 25 feet long. Two or more of the tunnels have nest chambers lined with grass and weeds. Armadillos spend the day in whichever burrow is nearest at the end of the night's foraging.

DEFENSIVE HABITS:

Contrary to popular belief, a Nine-banded Armadillo can not roll up into a ball. When he is frightened, he will leap straight up in the air, startling a predator enough to get away. He scampers as fast as he can to his nearest burrow and dives in. If he doesn't have a burrow nearby, he will quickly dig a hole and escape into it.

UNUSUAL FACTS:

- Armadillos are among the few animals besides humans to contract leprosy. As a result, they are used in research to find drugs to combat the disease.
- When digging for prey, an armadillo avoids getting dust up its nose by holding its breath for up to six minutes.
- Fossils of giant armadillos have been found in Missouri. These animals became extinct from 5,000 to 10,000 years ago.
- Armadillos don't hibernate, but are active all year round. Because they eat grubs and insects, they prefer warm winters because the soil stays soft.