

Managing

ARMADILLO

Damage



The armadillo (*Dasyus novemcinctus*) is a rather interesting and unusual animal in that it does not have a body covering of hair or fur. Instead, the body is covered with a protective shell of bony armor. There are nine movable bands across the back, and the tail is covered with a series of overlapping rings. The underparts are covered with soft skin and a few long hairs.

The armadillo is about the size of an opossum. Its front feet are well adapted for digging. Tracks made by an armadillo appear to have been made by a three-toed animal. Armadillos have poor eyesight, but a keen sense of smell. In spite of their cumbersome appearance, armadillos can run fast when in danger. They also are good swimmers and can walk across the bottoms of small streams.

Armadillos are active primarily from twilight hours through early morning hours in the summer. In the winter they may be active only during the day. Armadillos are burrowing animals. Their burrows are usually 7 or 8 inches in diameter and up to 15 feet in length. Burrows are most commonly located in rock piles or around stumps, brush piles, etc. Armadillos dig a number of burrows within an area to use for escape.

More than 90 percent of the armadillo's diet is insect matter. They also feed on earthworms, scorpions, spiders and other invertebrates, as well as on small amounts of fruit and vegetable matter such as berries and tender roots.

Biology and Reproduction

Adult weight: 8 to 17 pounds.

Total length: 2½ feet including the tail.

Color: Grayish.

Body: Armor plated.

Gestation period: 5 months.

Litter size: Quadruplets (four) of the same sex.

Litter numbers: One per year born in March or April.

Damage

Although armadillos are beneficial because they eat insects and other invertebrates, they sometimes become a nuisance by digging in lawns, golf courses, vegetable gardens and flower beds. Some damage has been caused by their burrowing under foundations, driveways and other structures. Disease is another factor that must be considered when evaluating armadillo damage. Armadillos can be infected by an organism that is thought to be the human leprosy bacterium. Although armadillos occasionally destroy the nests of ground-nesting birds in their search for food, there is some disagreement as to whether or not they actually eat the eggs. When armadillos cause damage, they may need to be controlled.

Control Methods

Trapping

Cage trapping is an effective way to capture armadillos, although they can sometimes be difficult to catch because they are so unpredictable. Traps should be placed in trails near fences or beside buildings. If the burrow is located, the trap should be placed at the entrance. Trapping can sometimes be more effective if two long boards are used on either side of the trap to funnel the animal into it (see Fig. 1). If the trap is placed next to a building, only one board is needed.

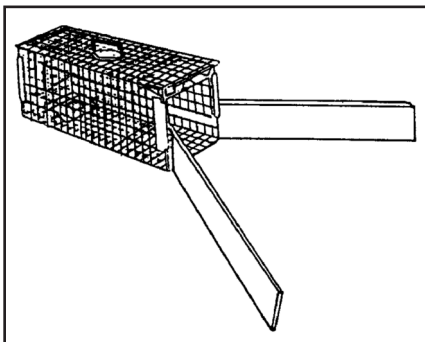


Figure 1. Set the trap in an area where armadillos travel or where they are digging. The trap is more effective when boards are used to funnel the armadillo into the trap.

If the trap is placed next to a building, only one board is needed.

It is not usually necessary to bait the traps when funnels are used. If bait is desired, over-ripe or spoiled fruit works well because it attracts flies

and other insects. Other suggested baits are earthworms or fishing worms secured in a nylon stocking.

Cage traps with dimensions of at least 10 x 12 x 36 inches are adequate. Commercially made cage traps are available at many hardware or sporting good stores.

Chemical Control

At the present time, there are no fumigants, toxicants or repellents registered for the control of armadillos. However, since most of the damage armadillos cause is a result of their digging for

insects and other invertebrates in the soil, an insecticide can be used to make the area less attractive to armadillos. Once the food source is eliminated, the animals will usually go elsewhere to search for food. However, before leaving the area, the armadillos may increase their digging in search of food, thereby increasing the damage to turf or garden areas.

Cultural Control

Since armadillos normally dig burrows in areas that have cover, the removal of brush, rock piles and tall grass will sometimes discourage them from becoming established.

Exclusion

Although armadillos can climb over small fences or burrow under them, fencing or barriers may be effective under the right conditions. A fence slanted outward at a 40-degree angle, with at least 18 inches buried, usually will deter them. If a large area needs to be protected, this method may not be practical because of the cost.

Shooting

In rural areas, shooting can be an effective and selective method of control. The best time to shoot armadillos is during the twilight hours or at night by spotlight when they are active. Either a shotgun or rifle can be used. Check local laws and ordinances before controlling armadillos in this way.

Restrictions

Although it is legal to trap armadillos at any time, persons wishing to trap armadillos and then relocate them should notify local Texas Parks and Wildlife Department representatives.

For additional information contact the nearest office of Texas AgriLife Extension—Wildlife Services.

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