

Armadillos are [New World placental mammals](#) in the [order Cingulata](#) with a leathery [armour](#) shell. The [Chlamyphoridae](#) and [Dasypodidae](#) are the only surviving [families](#) in the order, which is part of the superorder [Xenarthra](#), along with the [anteaters](#) and [sloths](#). The word armadillo means "little armoured one" in Spanish. The [Portuguese](#) word for "armadillo" is tatu which derives from the [Tupi language](#). Their average length is about 75 cm (30 in), including tail. The [giant armadillo](#) grows up to 150 cm (59 in) and weighs up to 54 kg (119 lb), while the [pink fairy armadillo](#) is a diminutive species, with an overall length of 13–15 cm (5–6 in). All species are native to the [Americas](#), where they inhabit a variety of different environments. Recent genetic research suggests that an extinct group of giant armoured mammals, the [glyptodonts](#), should be included within the lineage of armadillos, having diverged some 35 million years ago, much more recently than previously assumed.[3]

History and distribution

Like all of the [Xenarthra](#) lineages, armadillos originated in South America. Due to the continent's former isolation, they were confined there for most of the [Cenozoic](#). The recent formation of the [Isthmus of Panama](#) allowed a few members of the family to migrate northward into southern North America by the early [Pleistocene](#), as part of the [Great American Interchange](#).^[4] (Some of their much larger [cingulate](#) relatives, the [pampatheres](#) and chlamyphorid [glyptodonts](#), made the same journey.)^[4]

Today, all extant armadillo species are still present in South America. They are particularly diverse in [Paraguay](#) (where 11 species exist) and surrounding areas. Many species are endangered. Some, including four species of [Dasypus](#), are widely distributed over the Americas, whereas others, such as [Yepes's mulita](#), are restricted to small ranges. Two species, the [northern naked-tailed armadillo](#) and [nine-banded armadillo](#), are found in Central America; the latter has also reached the United States, primarily in the south-central states (notably Texas), but with a range that extends as far east as [South Carolina](#) and [Florida](#), and as far north as [Nebraska](#) and central [Indiana](#).^[5] Their range has consistently expanded in North America over the last century due to a lack of natural predators.

Habitat and anatomy

Armadillos are small to medium-sized mammals. The smallest species, the pink fairy armadillo, is roughly [chipmunk](#)-sized at 85 g (3.0 oz) and 13–15 cm (5.1–5.9 in) in total length. The largest species, the giant armadillo, can be the size of a small [pig](#) and weigh

up to 54 kg (119 lb), and can be 150 cm (59 in) long.^[6] They are prolific diggers. Many species use their sharp claws to dig for food, such as [grubs](#), and to dig dens. The nine-banded armadillo prefers to build burrows in moist soil near the creeks, streams, and [arroyos](#) around which it lives and feeds. The diets of different armadillo species vary, but consist mainly of [insects](#), grubs, and other [invertebrates](#). Some species, however, feed almost entirely on ants and termites.

Paws of a hairy and a giant armadillo

In common with other xenarthrans, armadillos, in general, have low [body temperatures](#) of 33–36 °C (91–97 °F) and low [basal metabolic rates](#) (40–60% of that expected in placental mammals of their mass). This is particularly true of types that specialize in using termites as their primary food source (for example, [Priodontes](#) and [Tolypeutes](#)). The armour is formed by [plates](#) of [dermal bone](#) covered in relatively small, overlapping epidermal scales called "[scutes](#)", composed of bone with a covering of horn. Most species have rigid shields over the shoulders and hips, with a number of bands separated by flexible skin covering the back and flanks. Additional armour covers the top of the head, the upper parts of the limbs, and the tail. The underside of the animal is never armoured, and is simply covered with soft skin and fur. This armour-like skin appears to be the main defense of many armadillos, although most escape predators by fleeing (often into thorny patches, from which their armour protects them) or digging to safety. Only the South American three-banded armadillos ([Tolypeutes](#)) rely heavily on their armour for protection. When threatened by a [predator](#), [Tolypeutes](#) species frequently roll up into a ball. Other armadillo species cannot roll up because they have too many plates. The North American nine-banded armadillo tends to jump straight in the air when surprised, so consequently often collides with the undercarriage or fenders of passing vehicles. Armadillos have short legs, but can move quite quickly. The nine-banded armadillo is noted for its movement through water which is accomplished via two different methods: it can walk underwater for short distances, holding its breath for as long as six minutes; also, to cross larger bodies of water, it is capable of increasing its buoyancy by swallowing air, inflating its stomach and intestines.

Armadillos have very poor eyesight, and use their keen sense of smell to hunt for food. They use their claws for digging and finding food, as well as for making their

homes in burrows. They dig their burrows with their claws, making only a single corridor the width of the animal's body. They have five clawed toes on their hind feet, and three to five toes with heavy digging claws on their fore feet. Armadillos have a large number of cheek teeth which are not divided into [premolars](#) and [molars](#), but usually have no [incisors](#) or [canines](#). The [dentition](#) of the nine-banded armadillo is P 7/7, M 1/1 = 32. [Gestation](#) lasts from 60 to 120 days, depending on species, although the nine-banded armadillo also exhibits [delayed implantation](#), so the young are not typically born for eight months after mating. Most members of the genus *Dasybus* give birth to four [monozygotic](#) young (that is, identical quadruplets), but other species may have typical litter sizes that range from one to eight. The young are born with soft, leathery skin which hardens within a few weeks. They reach sexual maturity in three to 12 months, depending on the species. Armadillos are solitary animals that do not share their burrows with other adults.

How to get rid of an armadillo infestation? Professional animal control specialists at Audubon Wildlife Removal will use specialized traps to contain and remove the armadillos. Because of the tough nature of armadillo skin, unique, custom traps must be used in their capture. Armadillo control and armadillo capture methods are humane, and include armadillo prevention and repellent. It's always best to let a professional capture and remove armadillos, to ensure all burrows and food sources are eliminated, and that the armadillo can be removed safely.