

Tolypeutes matacus

THREE-BANDED ARMADILLO

Class: Mammalia. **Order:** Cingulata. **Family:** Dasypodidae

Other Common Names: Armadillo; regional names include Apará, Mataco (species name), Bola (ball), southern three-banded armadillo.

Habitat and Range: Central and eastern Bolivia, the Mato Grosso of central Brazil, the Chaco region of Paraguay, northern and central Argentina. Primarily found in pampas, savannas and dry forests. It does not appear to dig holes, but uses the abandoned burrows of anteaters or sleeps under bushes.

Description: Overall coloration is blackish brown. Most individuals have three movable bands; some have only two bands and others have four. Unlike most genera in this family, in *Tolypeutes* the sides of the two large shells are free from the skin, which means there is considerable space in the shell into which the head, legs and tail can be fitted when the armadillo curls up. The second, third, and fourth toes of the hind feet are fused together with nails almost like hoofs. The first and fifth toes are slightly separated from the others and have normal claws. This species has only four toes on the forefoot. It moves rapidly with only the tips of the foreclaws touching the ground. The tail, which is nearly inflexible, is short, thick and has prominent tubercles.

Adult Size: Head and body length about 11"; tail length 2". Wt. in wild, approximately 2½ lbs. (captive animals may weigh more).

Diet in the Wild: Primary food – ants and termites which are obtained by probing into the ground, under bark, and into nests, using powerful forelegs and claws.

Diet at the Zoo: Moist dog food, boiled horse meat, and hard boiled eggs, blended; plus some cooked sweet potato, ½ hard boiled egg with shell, wax worms, banana, Edentate Powder (food supplement high in vitamin K which helps to keep the shell of the armadillo hard).

Reproduction: Single young. Newborns are miniature adults. Eyes and ears are closed, but claws are fully developed and hardened. The skin is soft and leathery and gradually hardens with age. They are able to walk and to roll into a ball within hours of their birth, if not immediately.

Life Span: 12-15 years; record in captivity 19 yrs.

Perils: Carnivores and peccaries. They are easily captured and are hunted for their meat. They are also experiencing habitat loss mainly due to mining and agriculture.

Protection: The three-banded armadillos are the only ones capable of completely enclosing themselves by rolling into a sphere. The head and tail is armored and fits together like a picture puzzle, completely enclosing the soft parts.

Interesting Facts: This order includes a small group of primitive, but highly specialized mammals which are found only in South and Central America and southern North America. It is composed of the anteaters, sloths, and armadillos. Among the armadillos (Dasypodidae) hair has been replaced by strong bony plates covered with horn. The scapular shield protects the shoulders; the pelvic shield, the rump. Between the two, plates are arranged in transverse bands joined to one. The undersurface of the body and the inner surface of the limbs are covered with soft, haired skin. These animals do not have canines or incisors. Food is caught by a viscous, cylindrical tongue. Teeth are small, peg-like and ever-growing. They travel singly, in pairs, and occasionally in small bands and are either nocturnal or diurnal. They possess relatively good senses of sight, smell, and hearing. The only armadillo found in the United States is the Nine-Banded, or common long-nosed armadillo (Dasyopus novemcinctus).

Human Culture and Folklore: Armadillo is from the Spanish and means “little man in armor” or “little armored one.” Ancestors of the modern armadillos were ten feet long. Early South American Indians used the shells as roofs or tombs.

Ecology: T. matacus also is referred to as the southern three-banded armadillo. The long-nosed, six-banded, and southern three-banded armadillos are hunted for their meat which tastes like pork or chicken.