

Chaetophractus vellerosus

Screaming Hairy Armadillo

Class: Mammalia. **Order:** Cingulata. **Family:** Dasypodidae.
Other names: Small hairy armadillo, small screaming armadillo, crying armadillo.



Physical Description:

One of the smallest and most slender species of *Chaetophractus*, the screaming hairy armadillo weighs up to 2lbs and averages about 1.5ft long, with long ears and more hair than any other armadillo species. This species has around 18 bands, of which 6 to 8 are moveable. They cannot curl all the way into a ball due to a small number of moveable bands, but still use their “armor” as protection. These animals are well adapted for digging and foraging in the undergrowth and have short legs, long powerful claws, and pointed snouts.

Diet in the Wild: Primarily insects, also may eat plants and other small animals.

Diet at the Zoo: Insectivore diet, mealworms, wax worms, bananas.

Habitat & Range: Desert, grassland, scrubland, and forest of Central and South America.

Life Span: Up to 16 yrs.

Perils in the wild: Coyote, jaguars, bobcats, cougars, wolves, bears, raccoons and larger birds of prey. Some people in Mexico, Central America and South America also eat armadillos, whose meat is sometimes used as a substitute for pork.

Physical Adaptations:

- Like other armadillos, it wears an armor of scutes (thin bony plates) on the top of its head and body for protection.
- It has poor eyesight, relying primarily on its senses of hearing and smell to detect food and predators.
- It has just a few peg-like molars. Since it primarily eats insects, there is no need to waste energy on producing large, strong teeth for heavy chewing. Their teeth lack enamel.
- Jaws do not open wide, so uses its long tongue to capture prey.
- It can go for long periods without drinking water.

Behavioral Adaptations:

- Other than a female and her offspring, the armadillo is solitary.
- During the day, it escapes the heat by resting inside a burrow dug deep into a sand dune.
- Mainly **nocturnal** in summer to avoid heat, and **diurnal** in winter.
- The armadillo walks with its snout to the ground searching for food and will dig into the soil to get at it.

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- When an armadillo feels threatened, it usually runs, digs, and presses its body down in the dirt to keep from getting flipped over. If captured, it squeals like a pig.
- It is a good swimmer. Holding its breath for up to 6 minutes at a time, it easily swims across rivers and streams. For the Armadillo to be able to swim, it has to inflate its stomach and intestines with air otherwise it would just sink due to the weight of its armor.
- They can also jump around 3 feet straight up into the air when alarmed.
- Armadillos mark their territories with secretions from their face, feet, and rear.
- The screaming hairy armadillo has been seen killing small snakes by throwing itself on top of the snake and cutting it with the edge of its shell.

Reproduction and Development:

- Males and females only come together to mate in the fall. After a gestation period of about 2 months, the female typically gives birth to 2 young. Babies have soft shells, like human fingernails, that harden as the animal grows and develops bony deposits under the skin.
- Armadillos wean at 2 months and sexually maturity is reached at 9 months.
- A female can produce two litters a year.
- A baby of a screaming hairy armadillo is called a 'pup', the females are called 'zeds', and the males 'listers'.
- Published studies have confirmed that armadillos can delay *implantation* for at least four months.

Additional Information of Interest:

- Sleeps up to 16 hours a day.
- Armadillo head plates are unique to each armadillo, like human fingerprints.
- The word "armadillo" is Spanish for "little armored one".
- One of the oldest groups of mammals, armadillos used to be classified in Order Xenarthra with anteaters and sloths. Modern genetics places them closer to carnivores, cetaceans, and artiodactyls.
- All armadillos are found in the New World (Americas), most likely originating in South America.
- The glyptodont was a prehistoric armadillo that was as big as a Volkswagen Beetle!
- His Majesty George II, King of England, was presented with an armadillo as a gift. This so-called "Indian Monster" was kept happy by supplying it with "Eggs very hard boil'd".
- During the Great Depression, armadillos were nicknamed "Hoover Hogs" by the people who ate them. The name was a bitter jab at President Herbert Hoover, who had promised "a chicken in every pot" but had instead presided over a collapse of the US economy following WWI.
- Armadillos are one of the few animals who consume fire ants as part of their diet.

Conservation Status: Least concern.

Conservation Efforts: Though hunted for its meat and carapace, the wild population of screaming hairy armadillo is considered to be stable.

Glossary: List of definitions of the most important recurrent technical terms used in the text.

Diurnal –active during the day.

Implantation – the process by which a fertilized embryo is established, or implanted, in the uterus.

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Nocturnal – active at night. Nocturnal animals typically sleep during the day and are active at night, and have a suite of adaptations for nocturnal survival, such as a heightened sense of hearing, smell, and sometimes even eyesight.

Sources:

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- Walker's Mammals of the World (1999) by Ronald M. Nowak
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