Euphractus sexcinctus

Six Banded Armadillo

Other names: Yellow Armadillo.

Physical Description: The second largest armadillo species, the six-banded armadillo is moderately hairy and yellow to red-brown in color. They have muscular but short fore and hind limbs, ending in large, sharp claws that aid in digging. All five toes on the front feet have claws. An armadillo’s protective shell is made of bony plates (scutes) covered with horny skin. Six banded armadillos have 6-8 moveable bands on the shell and 2-4 distinctive bands of plates around the base of the tail, where scent glands are located. They are 1.3-1.6” long and weigh 7-14lbs.

Diet in the Wild: Plant matter (bromeliad fruit, tubers, palm nuts) composes 90% of their diet; also eats insects, small vertebrates such as frogs, and even carrion. These armadillos have been observed to feed on dead carcasses by standing on them and ripping off pieces held in their jaws.

Diet at the Zoo: Banana, egg whites, dog chow, primate diet, crickets, mealworms.

Habitat & Range: Open areas, savannas, shrub land, and dry semi-deciduous forest in South America (Bolivia, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay and Suriname).

Life Span: 8-12 years in the wild, Up to 20 years in captivity.

Perils in the wild: Jaguarondis, jaguars, pumas, wild dogs, alligators, maned wolves, and humans.

Physical Adaptations:
- Stronger jaws than any other armadillo species.
- Armadillos like to swim, and they are very good at it. They have a strong dog paddle, and can even go quite a distance underwater, walking along the bottom of streams and ponds.
- They have poor eyesight, relying primarily on senses of hearing and smell to detect food and predators.
- They have just a few peg-like molars. Since they primarily eat insects, there is no need to waste energy on producing large, strong teeth for heavy chewing. Their teeth lack enamel.

Behavioral Adaptations:
- Unlike most armadillos, six-banded armadillos are diurnal, and remain active under bright daylight.
- Solitary.
- When digging, a six banded armadillo will pile dirt underneath it with the front claws, and then use the hind claws to throw the piled dirt out behind it.
- When threatened by predators, six-banded armadillos freeze, withdraw the limbs under the hip and shoulder shields and sit tight on the ground, protecting their vulnerable underside. If they are close to their burrow they may also try to run to it for protection.

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They use the same den site for quite some time, whereas most armadillo species abandon dens after only a few days. The den site is scent marked to establish territory. The den usually extends 3-6’ into the ground with just enough room at the end hollowed out for the animal to turn around.

Reproduction and Development:
- After a gestation period of 60-64 days, they give birth to 1-3 young, but generally two are born.
- Pups are born with the eyes closed. They make clicking and squeaking sounds to elicit a response from mom.
- Their eyes open at 22 to 25 days, and the young begin to take solid food at 30 days.
- They are usually sexually mature at 9 months.
- Published studies have confirmed that armadillos can delay implantation for at least four months.

Additional Information:
- Six-banded armadillos are the most common species of armadillo in Argentina.
- The word “armadillo” is Spanish for “little armored one”.
- Unlike most armadillo species, they can develop deposits of fat under the skin.
- Sometimes hunted for food, but meat not preferred, as it reportedly has a strong flavor.
- Armadillo head plates are unique to each armadillo, like human fingerprints.
- 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 glyptodon 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: N/A

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.

Sources:
- Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Gardens
- The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species; www.iucnredlist.org
- http://www.nurturedbynature.org/armadillo.html
- http://armadillo-online.org/facts.html

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