

Yes, We Have Armadillos!

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

By request, this week's column is about armadillos. And yes, we do have armadillos in Geary County and even in the Junction City limits. By the way, this is nothing new. The first reports of armadillos in Geary County stretch back over 20 years and I have photos of road killed armadillos within the Junction City limits from the 1990's!

Armadillos are fascinating little creatures by the way. But they can also be quite destructive in lawns and gardens. Armadillos are primarily insectivores feeding on earthworms, scorpions, (yes, we have scorpions around here also!) spiders and other invertebrates. They will, sometimes, eat plant material, usually tender roots, berries and small fruit that they encounter in their foraging and digging. On rare occasions they will also eat skinks, lizards, small frogs, small snakes and small eggs of these creatures. But primarily they like to root around in the soil for whatever invertebrates they can find!

Depending on how much food is in the ground and whether there is one armadillo or an entire family, armadillo damage can range from a few small "divets" taken out of the yard or garden to an area that looks like it was rototilled. Armadillos are usually active from twilight to early morning so you may never see the little armored rototiller, just the damage that they do! Armadillos are capable of climbing and they can be effective burrowers which is where they'll have their "nest" when having young.

Armadillos are fascinating creatures in many ways. Their armor plating is always a fascinating thing for many of us. They have been expanding their range northwards for several decades now. There are several species of armadillos all in North and South America. Their closest relatives, and they aren't that close, are anteaters and sloths. Usually the first armadillos in an area are young males looking to set up new territory. They have been found ranging as far north as southern Nebraska. Whether this spread is due to climate change or not, we may never know.

Armadillos produce one litter per year following a 150 day gestation. There are always four identical young in a litter and when we say identical, they are genetically identical. One egg is fertilized and it then goes through two splits basically producing four identical clones. Another interesting thing about armadillos is that they are one of the few creatures, other than humans, that can contract leprosy. Interestingly, it is estimated that 1/3 of all leprosy cases in the United States each year come from human contact with armadillos!

In southern Kansas armadillos can really be a problem in lawns, gardens, pastures and fields, especially along wooded areas, creeks and streams. Locally I have only seen possible armadillo damage a couple of times, but one of those instances was recent. Control is normally not necessary around here, but when it is necessary, trapping and shooting are the most common methods. Obviously if you live inside city limits, shooting is not an option. Live traps are probably the best option, especially when fitted with wooden wings to help direct them into the trap. Because of the potential risk of leprosy, I would avoid handling them!

Armadillos are not a commonly seen wildlife resident in our area, at least not yet. But keep your eyes open because you just may get a glimpse of one of this pinkish armored critters waddling around your neighborhood!