

ASK THE EXPERTS



RAY STAINFIELD PHOTO

This dirt-covered armadillo in western Kentucky has been rooting for grubs, a favorite food.

fairly common as far east as Land Between the Lakes in western Kentucky.

If you encounter an armadillo, just leave it alone. They really don't bite – they only have eight tiny peg teeth – but they can seriously scratch a person with their long

digging claws. The nine-banded armadillo can carry leprosy and may, in rare cases, transmit the disease to humans that handle or eat them.

A startled armadillo will jump straight up in the air. This is why a car trying to straddle an armadillo on the highway will kill it. Although these animals may damage turtle nests, they are not a particular threat to wildlife or domestic animals. They mostly eat insects, beetles, grubs and worms.

DAVID YANCY AND JOHN MACGREGOR,
wildlife biologists

Q Does Kentucky have armadillos?

Armadillos first appeared in the state around 30 years ago. Kentucky has the nine-banded armadillo, the same species found across much of the southern and western U.S. While the department has no estimate of their numbers, armadillos are becoming common in the Jackson Purchase Region and Land Between the Lakes. They are moving eastward and have been reported as far east as Rowan and Knott counties.

Armadillos arrived here from Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee and Missouri; they have invaded southern Illinois and southwest Indiana in recent years. As the climate has gradually become milder, more armadillos are surviving the winter and the species continues to expand its range.

There are second-hand accounts of armadillos hitchhiking to Kentucky on barges loaded with sand, gravel and mulch. However, since there were few early reports of armadillos being spotted along the banks of

major rivers, it is more likely that they arrived on foot.

The first verified appearance of an armadillo in Kentucky occurred in November 1987, when a newspaper reported the discovery of a dead armadillo in Carlisle County. Two years later, members of the department's Western Fishery District recovered the partial skeletal remains of an armadillo from the sandy bank of the Tennessee River on the McCracken/Livingston County line.

In the mid-1980s, the department had only received occasional reports of armadillos; by the early 2000s they had become



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