



This huge catfish shows there are still fish in Coke County! Tim Easley of Odessa reeled in this big 14 pound yellow cat September 3, 2011, while fishing on Oak Creek Lake.

plates that cover and protect their bodies has led to descriptions such as "armor-plated opossum" and "opossum crossed with a turtle." Although not closely related to any of these animals, these common references to their appearance are fairly close to the technical description. Their family name Dasypodidae roughly translates to "Turtle-Rabbit."

The natural fright response of the armadillo when startled is a vertical leap before fleeing, a dangerous reflex when approached by a vehicle that might otherwise pass over without harm. This fatal trait spawned the nickname "hillbilly speed bump," and made them a frequent highway casualty.

Prior to 1850, armadillos were not found north of the Rio Grande River except for fossilized evidence of extinct species. Due to a combination of factors, such as human colonization with its accompanying habitat alteration, extirpation of large predators, and intentional release or escape of captive animals, the armadillo has rapidly expanded its range at a rate 10 times that considered normal for mammals. Now abundant throughout most of Texas and other southern and southeastern states, armadillos have been observed as far north as Illinois and Nebraska, and westward to Colorado. Due to its abundance and wide distribution, armadillos have become a nuisance animal to many homeowners in suburban and residential developments, especially where wooded areas with favorable burrowing and nest sites are included or nearby.

Controlling armadillos on your property is not an easy task. In many cases it might be better to tolerate the occasional visitor than to take on the expense and possible collateral damage of control attempts. If frequent and serious damage is occurring, some action may be necessary. Removing individual

animals by trapping and relocation/elimination, use of repellents, fencing of specific areas (fencing must extend below ground), and control of soil insects and invertebrates with pesticides to minimize food sources are some of the methods most commonly recommended. Any method used has its limitations, with practicality, environmental pollu-

tion, and long-term effectiveness being major concerns. Whatever method is used, whether mechanical or chemical, be careful to do so in a manner that minimizes danger to people, pets, or other desirable wildlife, birds and fish.

If handling of the animal is involved, either for relocation, consumption (yes, armadillo meat is edible), or disposal, be aware they can on rare occasion be infected with leprosy, which may be

communicable to humans by contact or by eating undercooked meat. Handle the animals or meat with sanitary and culinary methods as you would any wild game to prevent contracting communicable diseases that may be present. Photos and detailed descriptions of control techniques and equipment can be viewed on numerous web sites by using search engines.

Myron Wiley is a Biologist Aide, Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries

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