

# TEXAS PEST

## Finds Plenty to Like in Mississippi



Jonathan Elliott

By Bonnie Coblentz

While more than one singer has longed to “go home with the armadillos,” most Mississippians just want the annoying beasts to leave their yards alone.

Jerry Jeff Walker popularized the line in “London Homesick Blues,” but homeowners with a yard full of divets each morning feel no such love.

Ed Hunter has 2 acres in Monroe County outside Amory. He gets up many mornings to dozens of about 2-inch square pieces of grass dug up and turned over across his yard. He said he rarely sees the armadillos that do the damage to his lawn, but he is trying to battle them.

“I drove up one evening and saw one in my parking area,” Hunter said. “He dove into my irises and disappeared.”

The next day, Hunter chopped down his irises and found a hole he thought was the armadillo’s burrow. He flooded it with water in hopes of getting it out, but apparently the animal had already left.

“I have gotten out in the middle of the night three or four times with a flashlight to find their holes and flood them or fill them,” Hunter said. “But they keep coming back.”

Bronson Strickland, wildlife specialist with the Mississippi State University Extension Service, said armadillos tear up lawns looking for food such as ants, beetles, grasshoppers, crickets and grubs.

“To minimize damage, take care of their No. 1 food item—insects,” Strickland said. “You typically do that by using some type of insecticide on the lawn.”

A second tactic is to limit the brushy vegetation in a yard.

“If you have a clear, open lawn, you’ll decrease the likelihood of having an armadillo on it. Smaller yards with a lot of brushy vegetation give armadillos places to hide,” Strickland said.

A final way to battle the armadillo is to simply remove them. Armadillos are not classified as a “nuisance” species, so they cannot be shot or killed at will. The Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks provides homeowners with information about trapping and removing armadillos.

The armadillo is not native to Mississippi. It entered the state from Texas by way of Louisiana in the late 1960s to early 1970s. Armadillos are about the size of a house cat and weigh between 8 and 15 pounds. The mammals are easily recognized by their namesake—the armor made up of overlapping pieces of hard shell covering their body.

Strickland said armadillos live in burrows in the ground that average 4 ½ feet long with an 8-inch opening. They typically range over a 10- to 15-acre home territory.

“One of the most interesting things about the armadillo is that when they have young, they always have four of the same gender,” Strickland said. “No other mammal does that.”

Another thing that sets armadillos apart from other animals is their ability to carry the chronic skin disease leprosy. Strickland said less than 1 percent of armadillos even carry the disease, and there have been no recorded cases in recent history of armadillos being found with leprosy in Mississippi.

As a precaution, those who may have to touch a dead armadillo should wear gloves and avoid direct contact with the animal.