Lafayette Natural History Museum & Planetarium
637 Girard Park Drive
Lafayette, Louisiana
The nine-banded armadillo (*Dasypus novemcinctus*), an animal quite singular in appearance, has been variously described as a pig in a turtle shell (Audubon and Bachman, 1854), tortoise-rabbit (Gardew, 1854), and if the dermal outer covering of an armadillo is taken off, the animal resembles a rabbit with a possum head. The Mayan Indians had a legend that the black-headed vulture, when it became old, crawled into a hole and became an armadillo (Nelson, 1918).

The nine-banded armadillo was first reported in Louisiana in 1917, but has been found in Texas for at least 150 years. It is a primitive mammal, little changed since ancient times. It is a distant relative of the sloth and the anteater.

The leathery carapace of the armadillo provides a tough and protective covering. With strong legs and claws, the animal can burrow quickly into the ground. The armadillo is an insectivore, though it has been found to ingest plant and other animal materials. In captivity they thrive on a diet of dog or cat chow, meat and some fruits. This nocturnal mammal does not hibernate and thus has to search food at night all year round. Its keen sense of smell enables the animal to locate grubs beneath five or six inches of earth. The clumsy appearance and awkward gait of the armadillo are very deceiving, for when alarmed it is capable of astonishing speed and agility.

One of the special characteristics of an armadillo is the uniqueness of its reproductive physiology. The female armadillo regularly produces monozygous quadruplet young developed from a single fertilized ovum. The four young from the same set have identical genetic makeup, and thus are excellent for biological and medical studies.

Since 1964, Dr. Eleanor Storrs, of Gulf South Research Institute (GSRI), New Iberia, La., has been using armadillo as a research model for various experiments. In 1969 Dr. Storrs successfully infected armadillos with human leprosy bacteria (*Mycobacterium leprae*). This is the first time that leprosy bacteria was infected into a laboratory animal. Even experiments with other primates have failed. GSRI currently maintains a colony of 300 armadillos for its research.
The cover drawing is taken from the series "Animals of Louisiana", a series of ink drawings by Charles Richardson. Postcards of the armadillo as well as other mammals, birds and reptiles of Louisiana can be purchased at the museum.

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