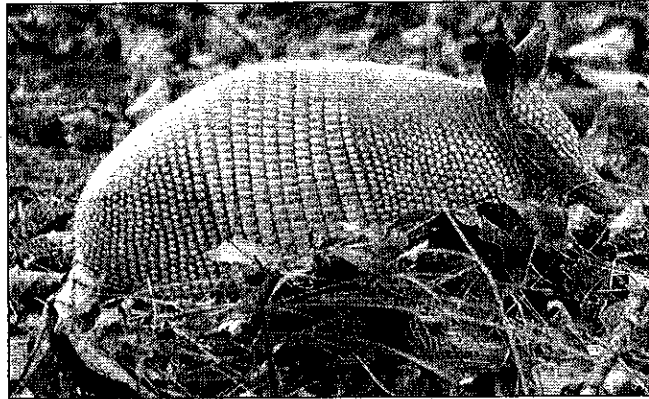


# Don't touch disease-carrying armadillos.

BY STEVEN BRADLEY  
THE JOURNAL

WALHALLA — An Oconee official has warned county residents against coming into contact with armadillos in the event of an encounter with one of the animals. “You’re going down the road and you see the old armadillos run over ... don’t touch those things,” Councilman Wayne McCall said recently. “If it’s dead, just leave it there. Don’t even try to push it out of the road. Just let it get mashed in the road.”

McCall said the animals are destroying turkey eggs and quail eggs, and also carry a parasite that “ruins the rabbits.” Most importantly, he said, armadillos are carriers of serious human diseases.



SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL

**Oconee County Councilman Wayne McCall issued a warning recently to local residents urging them to stay away from armadillos. The animals can carry leprosy, which McCall said is “about as hard to treat as tuberculosis.”**

“I’m worried about some kid seeing an armadillo flipping around in the road, maybe just half-dead, and (they think), ‘Oh, the poor thing’s dying,’ or somebody touches that thing — and you get leprosy,” he said.

“Then it’s a serious matter.” McCall said the area has seen an influx of the animals due to a “natural migration,” along with alligators and the Zika virus. “(Zika) travels on the winds of a tropical storm,

so the mosquitoes get a free ride,” he said. McCall said he has consulted a doctor about the treatment for possible contact with armadillos and was told hydrogen peroxide may help, but he emphasized the word “may.” “They’re digging up the gardens,” he said. “If you find them in your gardens — unofficially I’d shoot the son of a guns. But it’s something that everybody in this county needs to be aware of, because once (leprosy is) contracted, it’s highly contagious.”

The S.C. Department of Natural Resources shares McCall’s health and safety concerns about armadillos in information about the species available on its website.

SCDNR advises people to avoid contact with armadil-

los with bare hands, as well as contact with blood and fluids, as armadillos can be infected with *Mycobacterium leprae*, the causative agent of leprosy.

Leprosy, also known as Hansen’s disease, is an infection caused by slow-growing bacteria. It can affect the nerves, skin, eyes and lining of the nose, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

With early diagnosis and treatment, the disease can be cured. People with leprosy can continue to work and lead an active life during and after treatment.

In South Carolina, there is no closed season on armadillos on private lands with a valid hunting license. Night hunting is permitted from the last day of February to July

1 as long as SCDNR is notified.

In addition to carrying disease, SCDNR says armadillos can also damage turf as they forage for insects and other invertebrates in the soil.

McCall said he’d been discouraged about speaking out on the armadillo population because it could impact tourism or property values, but felt it was important to do so.

“But let me tell you something — how bad are you going to be hurting if you’ve got leprosy?” he said. “Armadillos carry leprosy. It’s on all of them. Leprosy is about as hard to treat as tuberculosis. So how much are you going to do for the property values if you’re in isolation?”

## official urges