

Move over groundhog, it's Armadillo Day

On February 2, Texans will turn to armadillo Bee Cave Bob to predict how long winter will last by Marylou Tousignant

[1] Much of the country celebrates Groundhog Day every February. Texas, known for its independent spirit, goes in another direction. There, this annual event in which an animal predicts how much longer winter will last, is called Armadillo Day.

[2] Groundhogs have been doing this job in west-central Pennsylvania for more than 135 years. These furry rodents inhabit much of the Eastern United States but are not found in Texas. So in 2010, Texans chose the nine-banded armadillo (pronounced arm-uh-DILL-oh), their state's new official small mammal, as their weathercaster every February 2.

[3] He is named Bee Cave Bob, after the city of his birth. On Groundhog, er, Armadillo Day, Bob is taken outside to fulfill his duty. If it is a clear day and he casts a shadow, the legend says there will be six more weeks of winter. A cloudy day means no shadow... and an early spring.

[4] It is the same ritual that Pennsylvania's famous groundhog, Punxsutawny Phil, follows. But in the battle of four-legged forecasters, Texas yields to no one. "We don't need no mangy groundhog in Pennsylvania predicting weather for us," Terry Boothe, a fifth-generation Texan and Bob's biggest fan, told reporters last year.

[5] The origin of Whatever-You-Want-To-Call-It Day is rooted in Europe several centuries ago, with mainly badgers in the starring role. German-speaking immigrants brought the tradition to Pennsylvania. Finding no badgers, in the 1880s they made the groundhog their go-to animal for winter weather wisdom.

[6] Neither Bee Cave Bob nor Punxsutawny (pungs-soo-TAH-nee) Phil, however, has a great track record. Both are said to be wrong more often than right, but it is a tough call since there is no clear answer as to when winter ends and spring begins.

[7] CommonLit is not taking sides in the groundhog/armadillo debate. Let's learn more about them so we can appreciate both.

Armadillos

[8] "Armadillo" is Spanish for "little armored one." Of the 20 species, only one — the nine-banded armadillo — is native to the United States. Bands are movable sections of the mammal's hard shell.

[9] Nine-banded armadillos grow to about 30 inches long, with an average weight of 12 pounds. Other armadillo species range from 3 inches to 5 feet. Armadillos can live up to 30 years in the wild.

[10] Armadillos mainly eat insects. They have strong claws and can dig burrows 20 feet long, in which they sleep up to 16 hours a day. When threatened, smaller armadillos roll up in a ball and play dead. Larger ones can jump four feet high when scared or surprised.

[11] Armadillos can hold their breath for up to six minutes and walk underwater or float on the surface.

[12] Cool fact: Nine-banded armadillos have litters of four identical pups. Quadruplets!

Groundhogs

[13] These furry rodents, also called woodchucks, are in the squirrel family. They are good swimmers and can climb trees. They feast on grass, other plants, fruit and bark all summer so they can hibernate (be inactive and save energy) all winter.

[14] Groundhogs are similar to armadillos in size, weight and digging skills. Their burrows can be more than 60 feet long, with several rooms and even “bathrooms” (without a toilet and tub, we presume).

[15] They use their sharp claws and teeth to attack crops such as carrots from below, pulling them into their burrows. To reduce wear and tear from all that eating, their front teeth grow $\frac{1}{16}$ th of an inch each week.

[16] Groundhogs can live up to six years in the wild, although half that age is more common.

[17] Cool fact: A groundhog’s heart rate decreases from 75 beats per minute to four during hibernation.

1. Which detail from the text illustrates something armadillos and groundhogs have in common?

A. “Larger ones can jump four feet high when scared or surprised.” (Paragraph 10)

B. “They have strong claws and can dig burrows” (Paragraph 10)

C. “These furry rodents... are in the squirrel family.” (Paragraph 13)

D. “They feast on grass, other plants, fruit and bark all summer” (Paragraph 13)

2. Which animal do you think is a better choice for predicting the end of winter: the groundhog or the armadillo? Explain your answer, using at least two pieces of evidence from the text.
