

## DIET OF *DASYPUS NOVEMCINCTUS* LINNAEUS, 1758 IN ATLANTIC FOREST AREAS OF SOUTHEAST OF BRAZIL

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### RESUMO

The knowledge of the diet of a species is essential to understand its behavior and its role in the ecosystem. However, the study of the diet of wild animals is still limited in many cases. The analysis of digestive tract content from road killed animals offers a unique opportunity to study the diet of several species in more detail, in particular species that are rare, elusive, and/or difficult to capture. The nine-banded armadillo is characterized as a opportunistic, omnivorous species, with a varied diet. It is described as preferably feeding on insects, including coleopterans, orthopterans, ants, and millipedes. It also feed on vertebrate remains. The objective of this work was to describe and analyze the diet of the nine-banded armadillo (*Dasyopus novemcinctus*) and its dietary niche breadth in areas of the Atlantic Forest of Rio de Janeiro. Road killed animals were collected between 2006 and 2018 on the of BR-040 highway between the municipalities of Rio de Janeiro/RJ and Juiz de Fora/MG. Eighteen roadkilled specimens had their stomach and intestine contents washed on a sieve, oven-dried at 60°C and screened. The material was identified to the lowest taxonomic level possible. Hairs found in the gastrointestinal contents were prepared and identified through cuticle and cortex morphological analyses. We then calculated the frequency of occurrence (frequency of a particular item in the total number of collected armadillos) and niche breadth using the Levin's Standardized Index. We found arthropods and hair in all samples. Hairs were identified as coming from 5 different species, ranging from rodents to carnivores. Arthropods were mainly from the Hymenoptera (94% of the samples), Coleoptera (77%), and Julida (50%) orders. Sixteen samples (89%) had vegetal material, with 12 (67%) containing seeds, mostly of Poaceae and Piperaceae. Fifteen samples (83%) had sediments, 2 (11%) had vertebrates and 8 (44%) had unidentified items. Levin's Index was 0.41, indicating a relatively specialized diet, focused on arthropods. Intact seeds were found in the samples, which may indicate the nine-banded armadillo as a potential seed disperser. It can be concluded that the species has an omnivorous diet in the studied areas, but consisting mostly of arthropods and plant material, with occasional ingestion of vertebrates, possibly including the consumption of carcasses.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** feeding habit, niche breadth, nine-banded armadillo, roadkill.

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