

hedgehogs

Recently listed at the UK's favourite wild animal, the hedgehog belongs to the order Insectivora along with shrews and moles.



COMMON NAMES European hedgehog, urchin

SCIENTIFIC NAME *Erinaceus europaeus*

DESCRIPTION Adults 22-28 cm long, covered on back and flanks by up to 6000 sharp spines; face and underside with coarse brown fur.

HABITAT Woodland, pasture, hedgerows, parks and gardens.

DIET Ground dwelling invertebrates, especially worms, beetles, slugs, spiders and grubs.



HABITS Nocturnal; solitary except for mothers with young; hibernates in winter; curls into ball when threatened.

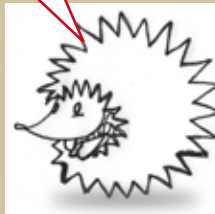
BREEDING 4-5 young born generally in spring after one month gestation; weigh 11-25g at birth; cared for by female only; weaned at 8 weeks; sometimes have second litter in mild weather though young may struggle to gain sufficient fat reserves to survive winter; sexually mature at one year, maximum longevity 10 years, usually less than 4.

DISTRIBUTION Throughout western Europe; including Britain and Ireland, introduced to some offshore islands.

CONSERVATION STATUS Common and widespread but evidence of a drastic decline is mounting.



Hogs can swim well, but may need help getting out of ponds and pools.



STEPHEN OLIVER, INSET DAVE BEVAN

reasons for their decline

LOSS OF HEDGEROWS AND ROUGH FIELD EDGES Intensified farming practices over the past few decades has led to fewer, larger fields which offer less foraging areas close to field edges.

PESTICIDE USE The move to increase food production across our countryside led to the overuse of pesticides which is likely to have heavily impacted on hedgehogs by killing off a large proportion of their insect food supply.

FRAGMENTED HABITAT Hedgehogs, like many of our native species, have suffered from the fragmentation that has occurred to our countryside. Laying new hedges to restore connectivity will take a long time to improve things for hedgehogs.

LOSS OF SUITABLE URBAN HABITAT With changes to the countryside hedgehogs, like foxes, have adapted well to living in semi-urban environments, particularly when kind homeowners provide extra food. However moves towards impenetrable garden boundaries, tidiness and aesthetics appear to have had an affect on our town-dwelling hog populations too.

BADGERS are likely to play a part only if other factors are acting to reduce hedgehog numbers.



STEPHEN OLIVER INSET PIES

How to help hedgehogs in your garden



Please try not to use SLUG PELLETS. The toxins can build up in the slugs and consequently affect hedgehogs too. If you must use them please only do so sparingly and collect and bin the dead slugs and snails before hedgehogs have a chance to eat them.



Another potential hazard to hedgehogs in your garden is FRUIT AND PEA NETTING. If it's in use please peg it down tightly to avoid large slack coils in which a hedgehog can become completely entangled. Otherwise please store it safely away. The same applies to tennis nets.



BONFIRES and COMPOST HEAPS are very appealing to hedgehogs wanting to create nests. Please do not use garden forks to turn composts without checking very carefully that there are no hedgehogs inside either. It is best to move a bonfire before lighting it to ensure that there are no visitors hiding at the bottom.



Many people like tidy gardens but hedgehogs really appreciate a MESSY AREA. This may also provide an alternative nesting site to a bonfire or compost heap. Leave hedge bottoms uncut and unraked. Keep piles of fallen leaves behind the shed. Hedgehogs often vanish from gardens at the onset of winter when people tidy everything up leaving nowhere suitable for the hedgehogs to hibernate.



PONDS are important in that they provide water for all kinds of wildlife - especially in hot summers. Hedgehogs can swim but many drown because they cannot get out of steep-sided ponds and swimming pools, or those made with plastic pond-liners. Please provide an access out such as a pile of stones, a plank or (best of all) strips of chicken wire dangling over the edge.



FENCES and WALLS, especially brand new ones, can prevent hedgehogs using your garden. Create small holes at the bottom, or remove a couple of bricks, to ensure wildlife can include your garden in their territory. If a fence falls over a hedgehog may be tempted to nest underneath it.



Please take care when using STRIMMERS. The type of area where you are most likely to use one is exactly where hedgehogs like to lie up throughout the summer. If you must use one please cut the rough grass to a foot off the ground and then check the area for any creatures before cutting down to ground level.



Although people have traditionally put BREAD & MILK out to encourage hedgehogs this can cause diarrhoea. The best alternative is to put out dog or cat food. You can also buy specially designed hedgehog food from Spike's World on 01522 688300.