



Hedgehog Welfare

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Information Sheet about your Garden Hedgehog

Hedgehogs are usually about in our gardens from late February to early December, but it really depends on the weather. After the first one or two warm days of the year, the hedgehogs may appear out of hibernation, but this is when they run into trouble. The weather can turn back to bitter cold and the hedgehog will be weak from its hibernation, having used up all its reserve of body fat. When a hedgehog first comes out of hibernation, it will be very thin, hungry and dehydrated. It can appear wobbly, if you see a hedgehog like this you can help by feeding cat, dog or hedgehog food (Spikes Dinner or Wild Things Hedgehog food)* and ensure there is plenty of water for them to drink (**never feed bread and milk**, as this can kill hedgehogs). If you do not have any cat, dog or hedgehog food, a digestive biscuit with peanut butter on it is a good short-term substitute, or chopped chicken (raw or cooked) or a little mince. If you wish to feed regularly feeding under an up turned tomato box weighted down with a brick on it, will keep the cats away from the hedgehog's food.

In really hot weather, hedgehogs starve to death and/or die of dehydration, so please remember to feed them and put out plenty of water, more hedgehogs die each year of dehydration than are killed on the road. Many hedgehogs also die from eating slugs, which have been poisoned by slug pellets. Beer-traps, coarse sand or ashes scattered around plants is a safer alternative.

In the late autumn hedgehogs are thinking about hibernation, they need a safe, dry place to sleep the winter away. A piece of wood 24" x 24" (minimum size) propped up against a fence or shed with hay and dried leaves for bedding is a good cheap alternative to a specially made hedgehog box. Other favourite places to nest (summer or winter) are compost heaps, under sheds or in piles of garden rubbish but you must remember the hedgehog, when you disturb any of these places. During the Spring and Summer you may disturb a female with her young in any of these nest sites, if this happens, please pick up the mother hedgehog **quickly before she runs away**, then deal with the babies. Try not to touch the babies (piglets or hoglets) but pick them up in the nest with as much nesting material as possible and placing the whole thing in a large box and then placing the mother with them, calling for help immediately. Try to be careful if you set fire to bonfires which have been in place for more than a few hours as hedgehog may think you have made a nest just for them. Hedgehogs need to be a minimum of 450gms to get through hibernation, but it is not just weight, it is shape as well, hedgehogs should have big round bottoms and not pointed at the rear end, so if you see any hedgehogs underweight when the heavy frosts start, please pick them up and give us a call for advice.

Signs of problems and what to do

The general rule is, if a hedgehog is out and about in daylight, it generally means there is something wrong. If it is active, looks healthy and going about its business in a usual manner, **do not** pick it up, it could be a female who stayed with her new young the previous evening because she has giving birth or it was cold or predators were about. Do keep an eye on it to ensure nothing is wrong. Hedgehogs never sunbathe, if they are ever found out of a nest lying on their sides or non active for more than half an hour, there is a problem whether it is in the day time or not. If a hedgehog at anytime appears wobbly, unsteady on its feet (almost drunk like) there is a problem, it could be only hunger or thirst, but if they are wobbly they will be dehydrated caused through one of a number of things. You should always pick up any hedgehog, which has obvious signs of injuries or any breathing problems. The sooner you get help for the animal, the more chance there is to save it and delay can be fatal.

When picking up a hedgehog, wear gloves or pick up in a towel, never with bare hands. Place in a high sided box (at least 15") or a pet carrier. Line the bottom with at least 5 sheets of newspaper (making sure any staples are removed or taped over from the bottom of the box). Tear more newspaper at least 12 sheets into 1-1.5" strips, the full length or width of the newspaper. Put the newspaper strips at one end of the box to make a nest. Then fill a plastic or glass screw top bottle with hot water, (making sure the top is on really tight), wrap another couple of sheets of newspaper round the bottle, placing it in the torn up newspaper strips. Then gently place the hedgehog next to the hot bottle and cover with the strips of newspaper, please do this whatever the weather, a sick hedgehog will be cold and if they are cold, they will not eat. At the other end of the box place a plate of cat, dog or hedgehog food and some water. Change the hot bottle every three/four hours and just before going to bed. Place the box somewhere away from any noise and cover to stop flies getting in (a bath towel over the top or a piece of sheeting is good as the hedgehog will need some air) then call for help.

24 hours a day

RSPCA – 0300 1234999

07.30 to 22.30

Hedgehog Welfare – 07940 714830
(please call after 18.30)

unless in an emergency about an animal

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