

Tiggywinkles Fact Sheets

Hedgehog Information

Our British hedgehog is related to 18 other species of hedgehog around the Old World. Ours is the most well known and appreciated. Its Latin name is *Erinaceus europaeus* and it is found across most of western Europe and also in New Zealand where it was introduced in the nineteenth century.

Hedgehog Habits

The hedgehog is nocturnal and only comes out at night. Any hedgehog out during the day is probably in trouble and should be taken to a Wildlife Rescue Centre. The local vet will probably have no specific facilities to care for hedgehogs. (Tiggywinkles 24-Helpline on 01844 292292 will be able to advise on a local rescue centre).

The hedgehog is covered with a coat of very sharp spines. It can roll into a ball and is protected from predators except badgers and the occasional dog. It will not affect or be affected by cats.

During the day, and during hibernation, the hedgehog will sleep in a specially built nest in thick undergrowth, under a shed, in piles of leaves, unlit bonfires and often in black plastic rubbish sacks left lying on the ground. It will not sleep or hibernate outside a nest. Any hedgehog lying with no nest is in trouble and should be referred to your local Wildlife Rescue Centre.

What does it eat?

The hedgehog is an insectivore that eats all manner of garden invertebrates from beetles, millipedes and worms to slugs and snails. As the countryside becomes devoid of this type of food the hedgehog is moving into gardens where it helps by eating the many garden pests.

In the garden the hedgehog can be offered a bowl of good quality tinned meat, dog or cat food with water to drink. Hedgehogs should not be offered milk.

Do hedgehogs make good pets?

The answer to this is an emphatic 'No'. Hedgehogs are wild animals and will never settle to captivity. They are nocturnal and sometimes a little smelly.

It is much better to encourage your local hedgehog to regularly visit your garden where it will be free but unlike other wild animals, will allow you to see it as it feasts on your dog food offerings. It will also eat a lot of your garden pests.

Hedgehog Families

The male hedgehog takes no part in rearing baby hedgehogs, which are called 'urchins'. They are born to the female after a 35 day pregnancy. She will have made a nest as a nursery. This can be under a hedge, in a pile of leaves, in a black sack or very often under a shed or outbuilding.

The urchins are born with their first spines, which are white, covered by skin. As soon as they are born, the spines start to come through. Hedgehogs usually have 4-5 babies but can have up to 10.

At birth the baby urchins' eyes and ears are closed. These open at about 14 days and their teeth start to come through after 21 days. After 8 weeks they are ready to become independent.

An urchin outside a nest is going to need rescuing. Its distress call is a high piping sound. It is no good putting stray urchins back into a nest or with other hedgehogs, they will get eaten.

Rearing orphaned hedgehogs by hand is not easy and should only be undertaken by people trained at Wildlife Rescue Centres.

On no account try to give a baby hedgehog anything to drink and definitely no milk, brandy or the like.

If you uncover a nest with urchins in it - do not disturb it but cover it over again and leave it. The mother will usually return but not if human scent is on the babies.

Do's and Don't's to protect hedgehogs in you garden

- * **Do leave some areas of wilderness where the hedgehogs can snuffle for insects.**
- * **Do put out water for drinking.**
- * **Do put out a bowl of dog food or meaty cat food.**
- * **Do install, in a quiet part of the garden, a hedgehog house.**
- * **Do read the Tiggywinkles factsheets on Garden Hazards, Bread & Milk and Hibernation**
- * **Do look to see if your hedgehog is limping or appears to be injured (Phone the Tiggywinkles Helpline if you are worried).**

- * **Don't put out bread and milk**
- * **Don't pick up fit hedgehogs**
- * **Don't leave black sacks lying around.**
- * **Don't use slug pellets or other chemicals, they may poison hedgehogs and other animals.**
- * **Don't light a bonfire without checking to see if a hedgehog or other wild animal has moved in.**
- * **Don't fork over compost heaps in case hedgehogs or other animals have taken up residence.**
- * **Don't spray hedgehogs with flea sprays. It may be detrimental to the hedgehog.**

Some facts and fallacies

Hedgehog fleas do not live on dogs, cats, humans or inside houses.

Ticks on hedgehogs (seen as greyish shiny lumps, often behind the ears) are not usually a problem unless there are dozens, which can lead to anaemia (Phone Tiggywinkles Helpline for advice).

Hedgehogs do not hibernate outside of their nests.

The hedgehog is not a rodent, it is not related to rats, mice or squirrels. Its nearest relatives in Britain are probably shrews and moles.

Hedgehogs do not always hibernate. If they do it is usually between January and March.



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