



Hedgehogs

Small, round, brown and famously covered in spines, the hedgehog is one of Britain's favourite wild mammals. However, the once common hedgehog is now under threat from development and habitat loss.

How to identify a hedgehog

Hedgehogs can grow up to 30cm long and weigh up to 1900g. They are able to travel up to 2kms every night; if think you have a regular hedgehog in your garden the reality may be that there are many passing through!

To find out whether a hedgehog is visiting your garden, have a go at playing detective. Here are some tips:

- The most obvious thing to look for are footprints. Although hedgehogs are relatively heavy they don't leave many footprints unless the ground is really soft. Try set up a simple small mud or wet sand trap. The prints are about 2.5cm long and 2.8cm wide. The front toes are quite widely splayed, but the back toes are quite long and slender.
- Hedgehogs tend to leave slight tracks through the grass of a lawn or small tunnels through undergrowth as they go about their foraging. A good time to see these is in the morning through the dew on the lawn.
- Hedgehog poo is another good indicator. It is usually dark in colour and between 1.5–5cm long and 1cm in diameter.
- Another way is to listen out for them at night, you may be surprised how noisy they are! Listen to them snuffling and huffing around as they search for food. In the spring they can get very noisy, as they fight over females.

Diet

Their natural diet is based on at snails, slugs and insects. They are also known to eat amphibians, birds' eggs and anything they can find! Food and fresh water will



Hedgehog - Credit Tom Marshall

encourage hedgehogs to return to a garden. Foods such as chopped peanuts, sultanas, raisins, chopped meat and mealworms are ideal. If you do choose to leave out food make sure to put it out at sunset, so that flies cannot lay eggs in it. If the food is not eaten by morning, it should be removed. Our excellent high quality bird feed suppliers Vine House Farm also provide hedgehog feed on their online shop: www.vinehousefarm.co.uk.

It is a common myth that hedgehogs like bread and milk, they do not! This combination can actually be extremely harmful as their stomachs cannot digest bread, and cow's milk is a breeding ground for germs and can cause stomach upsets.

Hibernation

Many animals which feed on invertebrates rely on being able to find vast quantities of insects and other small creatures to keep themselves alive. They therefore find themselves in a bit of an unfortunate situation in winter



when they need more food to provide the calories required to keep warm, just at the time their food supply disappears. As a result, in around November, hedgehogs will go into hibernation until spring when the weather warms up and insect life is abundant once again.

During hibernation, the hedgehog's body functions slow down and their core temperature drops to 10°C. This helps them conserve energy and survive the food shortage and cold temperatures. You can help hedgehogs during hibernation by setting aside a hedgehog-friendly area of garden where you can leave welcome heaps of leaves and brushwood. This would also be a good time to leave out a bit of high protein food such as minced meat, fresh liver or tinned cat/dog food, as hedgehogs occasionally wake up for short periods of time in warmer spells over the winter. These will help the hedgehogs maintain body mass during the harsher conditions.

Shelters are particularly helpful for hedgehogs during the hibernation season. It is relatively straight-forward to make your own shelter, or Vine House Farm has excellent shelters for hedgehogs for sale:

www.vinehousefarm.co.uk.



Hibernating hedgehog - Credit Tom Marshall

Why are hedgehogs in trouble?

Over 95% of Britain's hedgehogs have disappeared since the 1950s. Their natural habitat is being lost due to an increase in roads, housing and fencing, and gardens are being dug up for paving, decking and parking. The insecticides used on our crops and in our gardens are also contributing to our lovable and iconic hedgehogs seeing the worst decline in numbers since records began.

Find out more

If you are not a member then find out more about Yorkshire Wildlife Trust and how to become a member, plus more about the work we do to prevent the decline in hedgehogs by contacting us in the following ways:

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T: 01904 659570

E: info@ywt.org.uk

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Hedgehogs eating peanuts - Credit Gillian Day