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**Overview: All about Hedgehogs**

**Distribution:** widespread, from Britain and rest of Europe, except the far north, across to Russia. Absent from most Scottish islands. Introduced to New Zealand.

**Habitat:** mainly woodland habitats, hedgerows, fields, parks, town and country gardens.

**Description:** distinctive spiny coat; long, coarse hair on face and underparts.

**Size:**length: 20 - 30 cm.

**Weight: -**average 700g.

**Life-span:** can live up to 6 years.

**Food:** slugs, snails, caterpillars, beetles, earthworms, birds' eggs; sometimes frogs and snakes.

The hedgehog is the most easily recognised of British mammals yet they are steadily disappearing from the wild. As its name suggests it spends the day sleeping in hedgerows or under shrubs. Old names for it have been 'urchin' and 'hedgepig' and it has been the subject of some strange folk tales. One was that hedgehogs picked up fruit on their spines and another that they sucked milk from cows - both unlikely!

**How to Tell if You Have a Hedgehog in Your Garden???**

1. Footprints. Hedgehogs weigh around 1kg but they don't leave footprints unless the ground is very soft. ...
2. Droppings. Hedgehog droppings are a sign you have hedgehogs in your garden. ...
3. Disturbed Foliage. Hedgehogs leave a trail as they move around. ...
4. Noise. Hedgehogs make more noise than you might think. ...
5. Install a Camera.

**Do’s and Don’ts to protect hedgehogs in your 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 around dusk.
* Do install, in a quiet part of the garden, a hedgehog house.
* Do look to see if your hedgehog is limping or appears to be injured, or in late Autumn look out for underweight hedgehogs
* Don’t put out bread and milk
* Don’t pick up fit hedgehogs
* Don’t leave black sacks lying around.

**Hedgehog Fleas and Ticks**

Hedgehog fleas do not live on dogs, cats, humans or inside houses, they are host specific, so your pet cannot catch fleas from a hedgehog. 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. Removal of ticks should be avoided as it is very easy to leave the mouth parts behind which may lead to a serious infection.

**Out in the day?**

Hedgehogs are nocturnal and only come out at night. Any hedgehog out during the day is probably in trouble and should be taken to a Wildlife Rescue Centre. Local vets may not have specific facilities to care for hedgehog. However, please note that during the summer months female hedgehogs may come out in late afternoons to forage for nesting material and extra food for her young; she will be active and should appear bright and healthy.

**Too small to hibernate hedgehogs/overwintering**

Underweight hedgehogs will not survive hibernation, so need to be kept indoors until April time. Overwintered hedgehogs need to be kept indoors in a constant-temperature room (around 65°F or 18°C) to prevent them from trying to hibernate.

Try and give them as much space to walk around as possible, to give them exercise and build up their muscles. They will be more active at night, so if you need to let them out for exercise, then do this after dusk. If you hide their food, or put it a long way from their bed, it helps them to forage for it.

Food wise, we feed about 100 grams of dog or cat food (non-fish flavour) per evening. Hedgehogs need access to fresh water each day.

**Do I need to clean out my hedgehog box?**

The only time that you could clean out a hedgehog box is early spring, after hedgehogs have woken from hibernation and before they start to mate, which really means April time only. Check the box carefully during the dark evening, so any hedgehog using it for a day nest has had a chance to go off hunting, and if it is in use, then you should leave it alone, as the nesting hedgehog may decide to abandon the box. If you do clean it out, don’t forget to put in some new dry bedding ready for use.

Hedgehogs can wake from hibernation if disturbed or the weather conditions change, so they might be about looking for food when the ground is frozen and easy meals are hard to come by.

**I have a hedgehog sleeping on my lawn, is it ok?**

No, hedgehogs will only sleep in a nest during the day, so any hedgehog lying out on the lawn will be very poorly and will need to be picked up and taken to your nearest wildlife hospital as soon as possible. You can pick them up using gardening gloves and put them into a cardboard box, although they are good climbers when well, so you would need to ensure it cannot escape.

**I have seen a hedgehog out during the day, what should I do?**

Hedgehogs are strictly nocturnal, so any hedgehog out during the day time has a problem and will need to be picked up and taken to your nearest wildlife hospital. You can pick them up using gardening gloves and put them into a cardboard box, although they are good climbers when well, so you would need to ensure it cannot escape.

**What should I feed a hedgehog?**

Hedgehogs are insectivores, so the best diet is the bugs and grubs in your garden, which will also help keep the ‘pests’ down. Therefore, the best way to feed hedgehogs would actually be to encourage more insects into your garden. You can do this by leaving some areas a bit wild, planting native plants and shrubs, creating log piles, putting in bug hotels and having fresh water available (ideally a wildlife pond with a ramp for mammals to climb out).

However, to encourage them in to your garden you could offer a ‘top-up’ meal of a good meaty-based diet. Feeding hedgehogs in your garden should only be a supplement to their natural diet, or to help them during the harder Winter months, so it is important to not offer too much of any one type of food.

Hedgehogs are lactose intolerant so milk can make them very ill and should never be offered. Instead, put out a dish of fresh water each night. Hedgehogs are active during the night, so the best time to put out food is just after dusk, when they are starting to search for food. The Autumn and Winter months are the most important for them to find food to put on enough weight before hibernation, so always make sure you put out food at this time of year.

**When do hedgehogs hibernate?**

Typically, hedgehogs hibernate from late December / early January until late March time. However, this is very dependent on the weather and the individual hedgehog, as some will hibernate earlier or later and some not at all!

**What should I do if I disturb a hibernating hedgehog by accident?**

A hedgehog that has gone into hibernation uses up valuable body fats if they are disturbed. If you do accidentally disturb a hibernation nest, cover it back over with a thick layer of dry leaves and perhaps leave some dog food and water nearby, so if the hedgehog does wake up, he can easily find something to eat before he goes to find a new hibernation spot and rebuilds his nest.

**TASK: be a detective…….**

Hedgehogs like to rest in damp, dark places, like log piles or composts. If you have any areas like this in your garden and notice a place of disturbance, it could well have been made by a hedgehog.

Already have a [hedgehog house](https://www.amazon.co.uk/Clifford-James-Hedgehog-Hibernation-Waterproof/dp/B07B8GXV7L/ref%3Dsr_1_7?ie=UTF8&qid=1525862992&sr=8-7&keywords=hedgehog+house&tag=countryliving.co.uk-21&ascsubtag=%5bartid|2059.a.20120747%5bsrc|%5bch|) or feeding station? Place a large leaf over its entrance in the evening and check if it has been moved in the morning. If you don’t already have a Hedgehog house…. Why not research and try and make one!

**2. DROPPINGS SPOTTED**

It's possible to have droppings of all shapes and sizes in our garden from various animals, so how can we tell whose is whose? Hedgehog droppings are the size of a small cat poo but are round on top instead of pointy. If you spot any of these, you know a hedgehog has been.

**Task: Make a fact sheet all about Hedgehogs.**