



Save Our Hedgehogs!

By Chrissy Russell of Eastleigh Hedgehog Rescue

HEDGEHOGS HAVE BEEN ALMOST WIPED OUT BY HUMANS. Here are some facts:

Our beautiful British hedgehog, the nation's favourite wild mammal, is now officially on the red list, in danger of extinction within the next 10 years.

- In the 1950s estimated numbers of British hedgehogs were 35 million.
- Since 2000 we have lost 50% of rural hedgehogs
- Since 2000 we have lost 30% of urban hedgehogs
- There are now less than 1 million hedgehogs remaining in Britain.
- One of the biggest causes of their decline is loss of habitat. The loss of meadows and hedgerows to make larger fields for farming, and urban building projects that restrict the movement of hedgehogs in their territory, by restrictive fencing.

Please lobby your local builders to ensure that they sign up to the Hedgehog Highways initiative, and undertake to create a 5" x 5" hole (the size of a CD) in garden fences of all new build houses.

You can also join the initiative, make a hole in your own garden fence, and even get your street to become a Hedgehog Highway. Please [sign the petition](#) and also visit the [Hedgehog Street website](#).

FAQs

Q1. How long do hedgehogs live?

Wild hedgehogs, if they are lucky, can live up to 10 years, although 2-3 years is the average age. Tragically only 3 in 10 make it through their first winter. Some die of natural causes, but many die due to human interaction. As many as 350,000 die on our roads every year. [Further information](#).

Q2. What do I do if I find a hedgehog in my garden?

If it is later than dusk, and the hedgehog is active and not wobbling, then consider yourself honoured. Give him food and water, and perhaps a cosy hedgehog house, and you may end up with a regular visitor. However, if the hog is out in the daytime, or appears wobbly/lethargic, thin, coughing, or is surrounded by flies, then there is a problem and you need to contact a rescue. The only exception for this is when a mother hog is out during the day, collecting food or bedding for her nest. She will be busy and active, running around with intent, quite different to a sick or injured hedgehog.

Q3. What do I do if I find a sick or injured hedgehog in my garden?

Firstly, please read the answer to Q2, to ascertain whether it is actually sick or injured. If it is, find a high sided box, gently pick up the hedgehog with gardening gloves or with a thick towel (hedgehogs rarely bite), place it in the box, along with a hot water bottle wrapped in a towel. If you don't have a hot water bottle, use an empty plastic drinks bottle, ensuring the cap is on securely. Place the box somewhere warm, dark and quiet, and call a rescue. For an up to date list of hedgehog rescues, call the British Hedgehog Preservation Society on 01584 890801, or

visit <https://helpwildlife.co.uk/rescues/> Please do not feed the hog in case it needs surgery, although you can offer water.

Q4 What can I feed a hedgehog?

Feeding hedgehogs is very easy, they live very happily and healthily on kitten biscuits. Wet food may attract flies, and in hot weather will go off quickly. There are many specialised hedgehog foods on the market, but please be careful they do not contain mealworms, or other foods listed in Q5. The commercial foods can be expensive, so do take the kitten biscuits seriously. Just ensure there is a decent meat ratio, as opposed to cereal. Also, dont use cat treats, use a complete food. Most rescues use Tesco or Sainsbury’s own kitten biscuits. By the way, it’s a myth that you can’t give fish flavoured cat food. Of course a constant supply of clean water is essential, especially in hot weather.

YES to these:-

1. Fresh clean water, lots of it.
2. Cat food, kibble is good for teeth. Meat or fish variety. Jelly or gravy is fine if you use wet food, but watch for flies.
3. Dog food, make sure biscuits are a small size.
4. Specific hedgehog food, make sure ingredients don't contain anything on the NO list below.

Q5 What should I NOT feed a hedgehog?

Please, NEVER feed the following:-

1. Milk. Hedgehogs are lactose intolerant, and cannot digest it. It can lead to severe diarrhea, and even death.	2. Fresh fruit or veg
3. MealwormsATAre high in phosphorus and low in calcium and are a big nono for hedgehogs. They cause a condition known as metabolic bone disease (MBD) which kills.	4. Raw meat
5. Bread	6. Cake (yes really!)
7. Peanuts	8. Human foods
9. Sunflower Seeds	10. Eggs
11. Oats	12. Insects, worms, slugs or anything found in your garden
13. Raisins or other dried fruit	14. Store bought live or dried insects
15. Offal	16. Anything not on the YES list above!

Q6 How can I feed/shelter hedgehogs without inviting rats?

Most people feed hedgehogs for years without seeing a rat, although some people do have a problem. There is lots you can do.

PLEASE DO NOT BLOCK HOLES IN YOUR GARDEN FENCE, hogs desperately need hedgehog highways.

If you don’t want to kill the rats, be prepared to catch them in a humane trap, available online, and then drive it at least 2 miles away to prevent it from returning.

Bait boxes are enclosed and contain poison, but need to be inaccessible to other wildlife, pets or hedgehogs, as the poison is also lethal to them.

Install a bright LED light where you leave your hedgehog food.

Plant mint, everywhere, rats hate it!

Feed as late as possible, and take up uneaten food. If the weather is calm, perhaps have a coffee in the garden whilst the hogs are feeding, they will tolerate you, the rats will steer clear of you.

Again, if the weather is ok, put the food in the open, as opposed to in a feeding station, rats feel vulnerable in the open, or put your feeding station in the middle of the lawn.

Keep any outdoor food containers and also your food waste bin securely closed.

Clean up any unused hog or bird feed every day. And keep your BBQ clean, rats love that cooked on fat!

Check your compost heap, as rats (and sometimes hogs) often nest there. Turn the heap regularly, it may not be the hogs attracting rats.

Q7 Do hedgehogs carry fleas?

I remember my mother telling me in the sixties not to touch hedgehogs as they were running with fleas. That was when we had around 35 million hedgehogs, as opposed to less than a million now. I can confidently debunk this myth. Some hedgehogs do carry fleas, but not usually. The good news is they cannot live on humans or pets, they are exclusive to the hedgehog. They do however carry some diseases. Roundworms and lungworm are common, they can also sometimes carry salmonella and coccidiosis, lice, tick, mange and ringworm, so please do not handle them.

Q8 What should I do if I accidentally disturb a nest and/or find babies?

Firstly, DO NOT TOUCH! The scent of a human can cause a mother to abandon or even kill her babies. If mum is not there or if she ran off when you disturbed the nest, watch from a distance. If she does not return, or if you hear the babies peeping after a few hours, please contact a rescue. Do not be tempted to remove and raise the babies yourself. They WILL die. Every effort must be made to find mum.

Q9 How can I make my garden a safe environment for hedgehogs?

Besides all the above advice, there are a lot of things that bring hedgehogs into us that I have not yet covered. Here is my list, and it is most certainly not a comprehensive one.

- **Strimmers and lawnmowers.** Virtually all rescues see horrific injuries on a regular basis from these. PLEASE, before you cut your grass, check all areas, especially overgrown areas and under hedgerows. We would rather you disturb a hedgehog than maim or kill it. For garden maintenance companies, councils, housing associations, entities that employ people to cut the grass or verges, the British Hedgehog Preservation Society can provide stickers free of charge, reminding users to check before using these tools. [Here is a link](#)
- **Garden netting/football nets.** I have seen some terrible injuries caused by netting. The hogs become entangled in it, and the more they struggle, the tighter the netting becomes. This can be avoided by raising the netting up by about 5 inches, to allow hogs to pass safely underneath. Please ask your children to ensure that football nets are put away after every use, and make sure that they do! Failing that, again ensure that the nets are raised when not in use.
- **Cable ties.** Usually used in the garden to anchor plants such as tomatoes and vines to canes. Last year, I took in a young hog, weighing around 400g. He had a deep infected injury across his chest and back. A

visit to my vet revealed that when much smaller, guessing around 200g, he had become stuck in a cable tie that had not been cut open. As he grew, the cable tie tightened and cut in. It was so deeply embedded that my vet almost missed it. As the cable tie slowly tightened, it also deformed his ribs. I cant imagine the agony he had probably been living with for 1 or 2 months. How he survived is beyond me. But, survive he did, and grew into a magnificent hedgehog, and was rehabilitated when he was fully recovered and large enough to go home. Please ensure all cable ties, and indeed beer can rings, are cut so they cannot trap an animal.

- **Slug pellets** Metaldehyde slug pellets are soon to be banned, but at the moment are still being used freely. The poison in these pellets are lethal to hedgehogs and other wildlife. There is no need to use these. If you want to kill slugs, the most efficient and eco-friendly way is to use nematodes which are completely safe for both pets and wildlife, and extremely effective. I use these myself, and no longer have a slug problem. [More info here](#). Incidentally, although hedgehogs will eat slugs, they are huge carriers of lungworm, so dont feel bad for the hedgehogs if you get rid of them.
- **Dogs and Cats.** Cats present little problem to hedgehogs, most cats respect them, and are well aware of their spikes. Their teeth would not be long enough to be able to bite through the spines. A threatened hedgehog will “ball up” and a cat could not open him up. Dogs on the other hand, unless trained to leave them alone, can cause untold damage to hedgehogs. Most rescues have had to deal with many dog bitten hogs. Many do not survive. Please, if your dog is likely to cause injury to a hedgehog, please consider these options. Train your dog to leave them alone, or if after dusk he has to go out to relieve himself, only take him out on a lead.
- **Foxes and badgers.** Foxes and hedgehogs seem to be able to co-exist together, often feeding together at the same station. Badgers on the other hand, are the main predator of the hedgehog, and they regard our hogs as a great delicacy. They are one of the very few animals which can open up a hedgehog and attack its most vulnerable area.
- **Ponds** Hedgehogs are very able swimmers, and enjoy the occasional swim. However, they are not strong and tire easily. Sometimes baby hoglets fall into ponds too. If they cannot escape from a pond they will drown. It is imperative to build into your pond some means of escape. A gentle slope and a ramp would be fine. Make sure to put some kind of grip on the ramp so the hogs don't slip back in.
- **Drains** Please ensure all drains are covered. We receive lots of calls about hedgehogs trapped in drains. They may be injured, starving, dehydrated, in shock or hypothermic, and will need immediate attention.

Q10 How do I provide a safe place for hedgehogs to hibernate?

In the Winter, hedgehogs hibernate until Spring, although they do wake sometimes, and some don't seem to hibernate at all. Their homes must be well insulated and are called hiberniculum. In the warmer months you can purchase a hedgehog house. Please only buy wooden ones, not the wire basket weave, or igloo types, as hedgehogs sometimes get their legs caught in them and cause injury. For the winter, they need more insulation. Please follow this link from the British Hedgehog Preservation Society, and learn how to create your own hiberniculum for your visiting hedgehogs. [Click here](#).

I hope you have found some of this information of use. If you have any other questions, please dont hesitate to contact me via our Facebook page at [Eastleigh Hedgehogs](#) and/or join our discussion group at [Friends of Eastleigh Hedgehog Rescue](#).

There is copious amounts of information on the [British Hedgehog Preservation Society](#) website. Click on the information tab. There is also information on how to build a feeding station on the site.

We would like to thank Fair Oak & Horton Heath Parish Council for their support in our efforts to save hedgehogs locally, and also our Facebook members for suggesting all of the questions in this FAQ.