



ANIMAL ANTICS

HELP THE HEDGEHOG!

The biggest threat to hedgehogs is habitat loss. Over the last 30 years, agriculture has favoured large fields and the habitats of the hedgehog, particularly hedges, have been lost. Pesticide usage also puts pressure on hedgehog populations. With more hedgehog-friendly gardens however, the mammal's future should be fairly secure.

Helping Hedgehogs

Hedgehogs are the gardener's friend because they eat slugs and snails and other pests that damage plants. You can encourage hedgehogs into your garden by leaving piles of leaves and twigs around for them to nest in, or by making a purpose built shelter (see below). Food should be put out at sunset, so that flies cannot lay eggs in it. If the food is not eaten by morning, it should be collected. A good hedgehog diet would include tinned pet food, chopped peanuts (not whole ones) or crunchy peanut butter, raw or cooked meat leftovers, muesli and a small amount of vegetables. They should not be fed on bread and milk as this gives them diarrhoea.

Hibernation

Hedgehogs avoid the coldest times of winter by hibernating, usually between November and early April, depending on the weather. If it is warm enough and there is enough food, hedgehogs do not hibernate at all. During hibernation, the animal's body functions slow down, almost to a standstill. Heartbeat decreases from 190bpm to 20bpm and body temperature drops from 35°C to 10°C. This helps them conserve energy. Hedgehogs build nests called hibernacula in which to over-winter. If the weather changes during hibernation, or the animal is disturbed, it will wake and may move on to build a new nest.

To Make a Hibernation Hide-Out!

Make the box from untreated timber and make sure the entrance tunnel is 10cm square, no more - otherwise dogs, cats and foxes can get in. The ventilation pipe should be covered with chicken wire inside the 'house' so that leaves and twigs cannot get inside. For a diagram, please log on to: <http://www.lincstrust.org.uk/factsheets/hedgehog.php>.

Threats to Hedgehogs

- Slug pellets can be deadly to hedgehogs, but if you encourage hedgehogs into your garden they will eat the slugs.
- Bonfires can sometimes conceal a sleeping hedgehog, so please check underneath before lighting.
- Hedgehogs can also be injured by strimmers and lawnmowers, so please check long grass before you cut it.
- Litter is also dangerous to hedgehogs as they can become entangled in plastic rings that hold cans together, or become wedged in yoghurt pots or empty tins. Dispose of litter carefully and squash all your tin cans before recycling them.

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