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# Hedgehog *Erinaceus europaeus*

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## 1.0 Introduction

The hedgehog is the only spiny British mammal.

- Head/body length: Adults are typically 200-300mm, depending on age, tail about 10-20mm.
- Weight: Great seasonal variation with peak weights in autumn. Adults usually in the range 500-1500g, although well-fed captives may occasionally exceed 2kg.
- Litter size averages around 4 or 5 young, usually born between June and September.

Some females may bear a second litter. Males do not help to rear young. Young born late in the season may struggle to reach the minimum weight needed to last the winter – generally reckoned to be about 450g. The main hibernation period is usually November to March, but this is much affected by the weather. Hibernation is never continuous, hedgehogs will arouse several times, may need to build a new nest and may be found active during warm spells. In the spring they commonly spend a few days active then enter hibernation again during a cold snap. The winter nest ("hibernaculum") is normally made of broad leaves, tucked under a bush or log pile or garden shed, anywhere that offers support and protection.

Hedgehogs typically travel between 1-3km each night, males further than females. Ranging behaviour varies with habitat but seasonal home range size is surprisingly large – for females it is around 10 hectares (25 acres)

and about three times that for males who must not only feed but also seek out females during the breeding season. During the day, hedgehogs usually rest in a nest of leaves, typically of the same construction as the hibernaculum. A hedgehog will make and use a number of nest sites within its range, and these will be used flexibly, sometimes for several days in a row or just occasionally and may be returned to after a long absence.

Hedgehogs can live for up to 10 years, but this is exceptional; over half die before their first birthday and average life expectancy is about 2-3 years. Hedgehogs may carry several diseases, although these are not a serious risk to humans under normal circumstances.

Hedgehogs favour woodland edges, hedgerows and suburban habitats where there is plenty of food for them and sufficient cover. They eat invertebrates, including beetles, worms, caterpillars, slugs and almost anything they can catch, but little plant material. They will scavenge for carrion and may take the eggs or chicks of ground-nesting birds though rarely in large numbers and far fewer than foxes or crows.

## 2.0 Current status

The hedgehog is still commonly found in parks, gardens and farmland throughout mainland Britain and Ireland, although there are concerns about a general decline in numbers. It has been introduced to many islands including Orkney, Shetland, the Western Isles, Isle of

Man and some of the Channel Islands. Currently we have no accurate population estimates for hedgehogs in the UK. However, hedgehogs seem to be becoming locally rare or absent from places where they were common a decade or so ago. A recent study based on road casualty counts suggests as much as a 20% decline in numbers between 2001 and 2004, although further research is needed to understand more about this.

Although nationwide extinction is unlikely, current evidence suggests that hedgehogs are in decline and are relatively scarce in Westminster.

## 3.0 Factors affecting the species

Hedgehogs can survive well in both gardens and public green space if these are accessible at ground level, and most importantly well connected to other suitable gardens and green open spaces. Small isolated islands of habitat are of no use to hedgehogs as their ranges are so large, but provided small areas such as gardens are accessible and connected to other suitable habitat they can be of great value.

The biggest threat to hedgehogs is probably habitat loss and a decline in the quality of those habitats available. A key issue nationally is the change from small-scale pastoral farming to intensive large-scale production over the last 30 years. Predation by badgers which also compete with them for food can affect hedgehog populations. Other likely factors, and ones which are more pertinent to the City of Westminster,



include predation by foxes, the loss of land to development, the fragmentation of the landscape, road mortality and the use of pesticides in gardens which kills the invertebrates that hedgehogs need for food and may also poison them directly if bait is consumed. Hedgehogs require undisturbed areas of undergrowth in which to nest at all times of year and a supply of fallen dead leaves as nesting material. The tendency to keep parks, gardens, roadsides and other greenspace looking neat and tidy often results in the clearance of suitable nest sites in a way unsympathetic to the needs of hedgehogs. Under such pressures, hedgehogs may become locally scarce or even disappear.

As well as providing valuable habitat, gardens and open spaces can also be hazardous:

**Strimmers** can cause serious wounds to the sleeping or hibernating animals.

**Bonfires:** hedgehogs may nest under garden heaps. Turn the heap carefully before igniting.

**Garden ponds** can easily drown hedgehogs although they are good swimmers, if smooth-sided, the animals may not be able to escape from them. Leave an escape ramp.

**Garden netting** is also dangerous unless firmly staked down and kept taught to avoid hedgehogs and other animals becoming entangled. Netting should always be checked daily.

**Foxes** are known to prey on hedgehogs.

**Dogs** can attack hedgehogs, take extra care to keep your dog under control at night.

**Drains, trenches etc.** can act as a pit-fall trap. Do not leave them open.

**Slug pellets** can be either directly or indirectly fatal, as noted above, and not just to hedgehogs. They can kill other wildlife, children, and pets. Their use should be discouraged.

## 4.0 Current action

Hedgehogs are partially protected under the Wildlife & Countryside Act and may not be trapped without a licence from Natural England, the Countryside Council for Wales or Scottish Natural Heritage. The hedgehog is now included in the new UK List of Priority Species and Habitats (June 2007)\*.

\*Reference: Biodiversity Reporting And Information Group, Report on the Species and Habitat Review; Report to the UK Biodiversity Partnership June 2007

The British Hedgehog Preservation Society and the Mammal Society both produce literature, flyers and web pages advising on hedgehog-friendly practices.

Feeding hedgehogs can be really helpful. The provision of some meat-based (canned or dry) cat or dog food, or special hedgehog food is especially helpful during early spring when they are newly independent, when the weather is very dry or unseasonably cold, and also when they are trying to gain enough weight prior to hibernation. It is also recommended to provide a dish of fresh water. (See also advice re hazard avoidance in section 3.0 above).

Hedgehog sightings are currently recorded by The Royal Parks, Westminster City Council and The Royal Parks using GiGL (Greenspace Information for Greater London). The public are also encouraged to submit their hedgehog records as part of the London Wildlife Trust's Garden Survey.

## 5.0 Action Plan Aims

- To improve knowledge of the population and distribution of hedgehogs in Westminster.
- To raise awareness of hedgehogs and their needs.
- To protect and enhance the population and distribution of hedgehogs in Westminster.

## 6.0 Links with other Action Plans

- Westminster Habitat Action Plans for Churchyards and Cemeteries; Parks and Green Spaces; Private Gardens; Veteran Trees and Decaying Wood.

- London Habitat Action Plans for Churchyards and Cemeteries; Parks and Green Spaces; Private Gardens; Woodland.
- UK BAP priority species.

## 7.0 Lead partner organisation and working group members

The lead partner for this Plan is The Royal Parks (TRP).

Working group members include: British Hedgehog Preservation Society (BHPS); British Waterways (BW); Westminster City Council (WCC); Zoological Society of London (ZSL).

### Contact:

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# action plan: Hedgehog, *Erinaceus europaeus*

NB For a full list of acronyms see page 64 of the 'Westminster Biodiversity Action Plan'.

**Target 1:** To solicit previously unrecorded observations and pull disparate results together.

Action number	Action	Lead partner	Contributing partners	Start date	End date	Cost
1	Disseminate GiGL recording form to all gardeners, tree and park contractors and land managers.	TRP	ZSL, WCC, BW	05/07	07/07	-
2	Send hedgehog records to GiGL.	TRP	ZSL, WCC, BW	05/07	Ongoing	-
3	Review progress on action plan annually using the UK Biodiversity Action Reporting System (BARS).	WCC		06/08	08/08	-
4	Appoint GiGL officer to manage TRP records.	TRP	-	04/07	04/08	-

**Target 2:** To engage with all who may be involved in landscape design, management and planning in Westminster whether professional or amateur and deliver a simple message which conveys both need and recommendations.

Action number	Action	Lead partner	Contributing partners	Start date	End date	Cost
5	Run a seminar at ZSL on hedgehog-friendly garden design and maintenance for managers of green spaces.	ZSL	TRP, WCC, BW	04/08	12/08	£1.5k
6	Participate in hedgehog awareness week.	TRP	BW, WCC, ZSL	04/07	Ongoing	-
7	Include hedgehog information on new "Woodland Walk" interpretative panel @ ZSL.	ZSL		04/07	03/09	-
8	To disseminate British Hedgehog Preservation Society literature.	TRP	BHPS, BW, WCC, ZSL			-

**Target 3:** To engage with all who may be involved in landscape design, management and planning in Westminster whether professional or amateur and deliver a simple message which conveys both need and recommendations.

Action number	Action	Lead partner	Contributing partners	Start date	End date	Cost
9	Produce management plans for the enhancement of habitats, especially on sites where hedgehogs are known.	TRP	BW, WCC, ZSL	04/07	03/09	-
10	Audit current extent of suitable habitat.	TRP	GiGL, WCC, ZSL	04/07	03/09	-
11	Implement management plans and monitor increase in area of suitable habitat.	TRP	GiGL, WCC, ZSL	04/07	Ongoing	-