

# EUROPEAN HEDGEHOG

(*Erinaceus europaeus*)

GB IUCN status **Vulnerable**

## General Information

West European hedgehogs are unmistakable, with their coat of brown and cream spines. Their average life expectancy is two - three years in the wild, although they have been known to live for 10 years in exceptional circumstances. Hedgehogs are nocturnal, so are rarely seen during the day.



Hedgehogs mate in spring, then give birth to litters of four - five young around four weeks later. The hoglets are mainly born in June to July, and remain in the nest for three - four weeks. They then forage with their mother for around 10 days, before becoming fully independent. Females sometimes have a second litter in September or October.

Hedgehogs hibernate in winter nests made of leaves, tucked under structures such as bushes or log piles or garden sheds. Hibernation usually begins in November, and ends around March/April, but this depends on the weather. They will wake up several times over the winter, and will often build a new nest. In the spring they may be active for a few nights, then return to hibernation during a cold snap. Hedgehogs need to weigh at least 450g before hibernation or they will not have enough fat reserves to survive. Hedgehogs eat invertebrates such as beetles, worms, caterpillars, millipedes and leatherjackets. They will also take eggs and chicks of ground-nesting birds, baby rodents, frogs, carrion, and fallen fruit.

## Habitat Requirements

Hedgehogs are increasingly associated with urban habitats, such as parks and gardens, but are also found in woodland edges, hedges, and pastures. They are less likely to be found in intensively farmed arable land, moorland, and conifer plantations.

Hedgehogs are generally solitary and non-territorial, but they have a home range of around 10-20 hectares, and will travel about 1-2km per night. Males will travel more than females, especially during the breeding season.

## Distribution

Hedgehogs are a ubiquitous species as well as a habitat and diet generalist. They are found in most counties and habitats across Britain, with the exception of some islands as well as wetlands, extensive pine forests and some upland areas including moorlands and mountainsides. Survey data indicates that hedgehogs are faring better in urban and suburban areas than in the rural landscape. As a species with a broad range, translocations are not recommended as a conservation measure for hedgehogs.

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For further information on hedgehog threats and how to mitigate them, visit 'Hedgehog Street' our joint project with British Hedgehog Preservation Society:

<https://www.hedgehogstreet.org/hedgehog-road-signs/>

## Species Pressures

Although still relatively common and widespread, there is now considerable evidence for a dramatic decline of hedgehogs in recent years, with around a third of the national population lost since the millennium. Declines have occurred in both rural and urban habitats, due to a range of factors. The main threats to hedgehogs are:

### Habitat loss

An historic, widespread change from pastoral farming to arable crops and the removal of hedgerows to increase field sizes reduced the habitat available for hedgehogs in rural areas. Changes to hedgerow management (flailing instead of hedge-laying) leads to gaps at the base, making them less suitable for nesting. In urban areas, car parking, decking, and over-tidy gardens and other green spaces reduce the area available for foraging, and destroy hibernation habitats. Impermeable garden and park fences and walls limits the amount of habitat available for hedgehogs, and can force them out onto roads.

### Pesticides

The use of slug pellets and pesticides in gardens, urban green spaces and for intensive farming can lead to toxin accumulation in hedgehogs and reduce the amount of invertebrate food available for them.

### Roads

Busy roads cause hedgehog mortalities; it has been estimated that up to 100,000 hedgehogs are killed on the UK's roads each year. They can also act as barriers to movement and disrupt dispersal routes.

### Garden and green space management activities

The use of strimmers can injure hedgehogs, ponds and swimming pools with steep sides can trap and drown hedgehogs, netting and litter can entangle and trap hedgehogs, and hedgehogs will hibernate in garden bonfires.

### Badgers

As the main natural predator of hedgehogs, increasing numbers of badgers, especially in the southwest, may have an effect, especially where the habitat is already degraded.

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## Conservation Actions 'Potential Measures'

### Increase suitable habitat

Effective actions include planting more hedges, bushes and scrub areas, encourage encouraging regenerative farming practices, encouraging good hedge management, encouraging wildlife friendly gardening, increasing permeability of urban habitat through 13cm x 13cm holes in fences known as 'hedgehog highways' and listing these as a planning condition on new-build sites.

### Raise awareness of hazards

Raise awareness of hazards to hedgehogs including injury from landscaping equipment, drowning in ponds and entanglement in sports netting and litter. Encourage hedgehog friendly gardening practices with homeowners. Ensure professionals (greenspace managers, landscapers etc.) are provided with specific guidance or training on hazards and mitigation, as well as appropriate timings for habitat clearance, and incorporation of well-connected wildlife friendly features.

### Habitat management

Ensure parks and other managed greenspaces have ample scrub and hedgerow habitat, with areas of decaying wood retained. Fallen leaves should be swept into leaf stores and grass managed in a mosaic of long grass, short turf, open soil and tussocks. Invertebrate prey should be supported through varied nectar sources and herbaceous vegetation. Manage linear landscape features such as railways and road verges in a sympathetic, hedgehog friendly way.

### Mitigate roadkill

Install small mammal road signs at key roadkill 'hotspots' such as those close to areas of signposted speed limit change on the outskirts of towns and villages.

### Reduce use of harmful pesticides and pollution

Encourage organic and regenerative farming practices with reduced herbicide and pesticide use. Discourage the use of slug pellets and pesticides in gardens and parks.