

Everyone can help our Hedgehogs.



Image: <https://www.hedgehogstreet.org/about-hedgehogs/where-do-they-live/>

Hedgehog Awareness Week 2nd – 8th May is organised by the British Hedgehog Preservation Society (<https://www.britishhedgehogs.org.uk>). It aims to highlight the problems hedgehogs face and how we can help them. This year the Charity is asking people to create their very own hedgehog haven; gardens are a stronghold for hedgehogs, and we can make their lives so much easier with very little effort!

We are so lucky in Cheselbourne that we still have Hedgehogs. They are part of our literary heritage, they share our gardens and, if we're patient, allow us a close glimpse into their lives and so many people are fond of them. Hedgehogs are nocturnal and primarily insectivorous and they are a help in the garden, eating pests. Hedgehogs mate between April and September, but mainly between May and June and litters usually consist of around four or five young (hoglets), born between June and July. Hibernation usually takes place between November and mid-March, although this is dependent on the weather.

But hedgehogs are struggling, in the past decade we have lost over a half of rural hedgehogs and hedgehogs have been added to the Red List for British Mammals as 'vulnerable to extinction'. Arable land in particular is often no longer a good environment for them. Habitat loss and fragmentation with larger fields and the loss of hedges and copses result in fewer nesting sites and less protection. Prey availability, the insect larvae and soil invertebrates such as earthworms and slugs that make up a large part of hedgehogs' diet can be scarce in agricultural soils. Instead, hedgehogs are turning more to our villages to find the things they need. Sadly, even here we are failing them. We tidy our gardens too much and leave them no space to feed or nest; we use chemicals such as slug pellets which, when hedgehogs eat the slugs, builds up the poisons in their bodies; we fence in our gardens forcing the hedgehogs onto roads. Nationwide, it's estimated that around 100,000 hedgehogs are killed annually on our roads.

How to help Hedgehogs: there are so many ways that we can help them and many of these are really easy to do.

1. **Hedgehog highways.** Hedgehogs need to be able to roam. No garden is big enough to support a hedgehog. They will travel about 2Km a night and up to 3 Km if they are looking for a mate. They need to be able to move freely from garden to garden so please make sure that your garden has access holes in fences for them to move through. A hole about 13/13 cm (about the size of CD case) would be perfect. If possible, talk to your neighbours to see if you can link your gardens together so that hedgehogs are not forced onto roads. [Hedgehog Street](#) is a joint campaign run by the People's Trust for Endangered Species and the British Hedgehog Preservation

Society (BHPS), one of its aims is to encourage people to link their gardens and make 'Hedgehog Highways' that are rich in insects and free from hazards.

2. **A place to stay.** Hedgehogs need a place to nest. To help them, make a log pile in a quiet undisturbed corner of the garden and cover it with twigs; the bigger you can make it the better. As the wood rots down, replenish the logs from time to time; this will be used by many invertebrates as well, adding to the food available for your hedgehog. Make an open compost heap if you can as these will provide shelter and a place to nest for your hedgehog. You could buy or build them a hedgehog house; instructions can be found on the links below.

<https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/actions/how-build-hedgehog-home>

<https://www.hedgehogstreet.org/help-hedgehogs/hedgehog-homes/>

Make piles of leaves and areas of longer grass, hedgehogs take a lot of care to make a cosy nest for the winter and will use leaves and dried grass to make a warm nest. They like to put the bedding in themselves. They also need a nest to raise their young in the spring so any place that you hope to have a hedgehog stay should be left undisturbed.

3. **A place to feed.** Leave an area of garden to 'go wild', an area of long grass will help to provide the hedgehogs with a wide range of food as it will encourage a variety of insects in your garden, if you can add wildflowers to this and it will encourage an even wider range of invertebrates.

Just after and before hibernation can be especially difficult times for hedgehogs to find enough food. You can help them by leaving supplementary food for them. You can safely give them:

- Cat biscuits
- Wet cat or dog food
- Proprietary hedgehog foods. These will have the correct balance of nutrients they need and some are disliked by cats! Ark wildlife biscuits are reported to be good for this. I have found that the hedgehogs like WildThings hedgehog food but cats don't- we have watched the hedgehogs eating on our night wildlife camera – no cats!

Things NOT to give them:

- Bread and milk. They don't have the ability to digest the lactose in milk and it can badly upset their stomach.
- Meal worms. Although hedgehogs love these if too many are eaten, they cause metabolic bone disease. This displaces calcium in the hedgehog's bones causing them to fracture.

ALWAYS leave water available for them as well.

Without meaning to we can hurt Hedgehogs in the garden

4. **Please don't use chemicals in your garden.** Not only do they have the potential to reduce the amount of insect food for the hedgehogs but they can be directly harmful as well. Old coffee grounds work really well as an alternative to slug pellets. They don't have to be replaced all the time after rain etc. but seem to keep their slug deterrent properties for some while. My lupins are thriving using this method where before they were slugged to pieces! Other people have found that finely ground egg shells have worked to deter slugs.
5. **Always check** bonfires, piles of leaves, grass cutting, compost heaps and bags of rubbish before burning, mowing, forking, strimming or disposing of any of them.
6. **Plastic** is a real hazard for hedgehogs. Many plastic items can trap or cut hedgehogs, so remove any netting, plastic cups, large necked bottles, pots, and general plastic rubbish (and barbed wire) from the garden as soon as is possible.
7. **Hedgehogs like to drink from ponds and can sometimes fall in.** Although they're good swimmers, they will drown if they can't get out. If you can, put a gentle slope in your pond (this will also help pond life) but if not a plank, at a gentle angle, will provide them with a route out.
8. **Holes.** Make sure deep holes and drains are covered so that hedgehogs can't fall in and not be able to get out. They have very poor eye sight relying on their sense of smell to find their pry.

Information on what to do if you find a **sick or injured hedgehog** can be found on the Hedgehog street website <https://www.hedgehogstreet.org/sick-or-injured-hedgehog/>

Data on hedgehog numbers is badly needed. If you are lucky enough to see a hedgehog alive – or sadly dead- please map it on the **Big Hedgehog map** at <https://bighedgehogmap.org/>

In Cheselbourne we have a hedgehog champion, Barbara Lilley, who has experience of caring for sick and injured hedgehogs and tells me she once had 11 cages of hedgehogs in a spare bedroom! If you are concerned about the welfare of a hedgehog or find one out in the day and want to chat to Barbara, she can be contacted on 07760614223. Alternatively many vets treat wildlife for donations.

You can expect to hear more from Barbara in future editions of Village News.

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