



Benson Nature Group

Caring for Benson's green spaces

Caring for Hedgehogs in Benson



It is estimated that there has been a decline of 97% in the UK's hedgehog population since the 1950's (from 36 million to under 1 million) and that numbers have reduced by 50% in rural areas since the year 2000. The reasons for this decline are still being studied but habitat loss (larger fields, reduction in hedgerow, poor hedgerow management, replacement of garden hedges with impermeable fences etc) and use of chemicals and pesticides are leading causes. Recently however there is some evidence that the decline in urban areas might have stabilised but in view of the continuing rural decline, it is vital to do all we can to protect the ones we have.

We are fortunate to still have hedgehogs in Benson and Benson Nature Group is encouraging residents and developers to take actions to protect them. We are asking developers and planners to ensure there is connectivity between gardens in new developments by providing hedgehog friendly fencing and site layouts that enable hedgehogs to move around the area without encountering dangerous roads.

How to tell if a hedgehog is unwell

- Hedgehogs, particularly young ones, can quickly become dehydrated during hot/dry weather. They can also suffer from ring worm (wear gloves when handling them) or lung worm (capillaria) which they pick up from eating earthworms. Also, large numbers of ticks or fleas can be indicative of an underlying health problem.
- Sometimes female hedgehogs are out during the day, busy building a nest. But if a hedgehog is lethargic, wobbly on its feet, does not roll up into a tight ball when picked up, is out in the day and not moving much, has many ticks or a lot of fleas then it is very likely to be unwell. Act quickly and get advice as below. Speed is of the essence.

If you find a sick or injured hedgehog put it safely in a high-sided cardboard box/pet carrier and call Louise at Hogs' Haven in Wallingford on 07475 805 926.

What else can be done to help?

- Put shallow bowls of water out. Dehydration is a common cause of death in hedgehogs, particularly hoglets in hot/dry weather. Large drip trays that go under plant pots are ideal and benefit birds too.
- Avoid the use of chemicals and pesticides – eg slug pellets, ant powder etc. These are not only harmful to hedgehogs but eliminate important food sources. If you need to eliminate rats, use a method (and contractor) that does not harm non-target species.

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- Check your lawn edges/long grass before using a strimmer. Hedgehogs often curl up close to the edges of lawns or in long grass to sleep during the day. Strimmer injuries are invariably fatal.
- Hedgehogs may hibernate in bonfire piles. Carefully move your pile to a different area on the day you intend to burn and check for hedgehogs.
- Improve connectivity between gardens by installing hedgehog friendly fencing or making a hole 7" square at the bottom of your garden fences (with permission if necessary) to allow them access to other gardens.
- They will use nesting boxes if provided in a quiet spot (eg under a bush) in your garden.
- Do NOT feed them bread and milk as this will give them diarrhoea as they are lactose intolerant. Instead, peanuts and meat-based cat or dog food are recommended. Dried mealworms are no longer recommended as recent studies have shown that they can cause metabolic bone disease in hedgehogs. You can also buy hedgehog food from garden centres.
- If you have a pond, ensure there is some means of escape in case a hedgehog falls in – eg a sloping edge or a small ladder or plank.
- Minimise the use of netting in gardens and allotments as hedgehogs' spines get entangled easily. Check netting frequently.
- To overwinter successfully young hoglets need to have reached a weight of 600g. If you discover hoglets weighing less than this, catch them (using strong gloves), put them in a high-sided box/pet carrier and contact Hogs' Haven (see above).

Other information

- Some hedgehogs may carry fleas. but they do not transfer to pet cats or dogs as hedgehog fleas are specially adapted to hedgehogs.
- From 1st July 2019 slug pellets containing metaldehyde were no longer sold and gardeners' stockpiles had to be used by spring 2020. A total ban is now in place.
- Tiggywinkles will also care for sick/injured hedgehogs. However, they require you to sign them over to them and do not return them to their original territory. By contrast, Hogs' Haven will usually release them back to their original location. As they are a small organisation relying on the generosity of the public a small donation to help with their work is always appreciated. They also appreciate old towels (light coloured ones), newspapers, puppy pads, brulee pots, and shoe boxes. See <https://www.facebook.com/wallingfordhedgehogrescue/>
- For more advice on wildlife friendly gardening in a local context visit <https://www.bensonnaturegroup.com/>
- For more detail on hedgehogs and their decline visit <https://www.hedgehogstreet.org/about-hedgehogs/why-are-they-disappearing/> or <https://phys.org/news/2018-09-factors-decline-britain-hedgehogs.html>

