

# Natural Environment Team

## hedgehog advice note

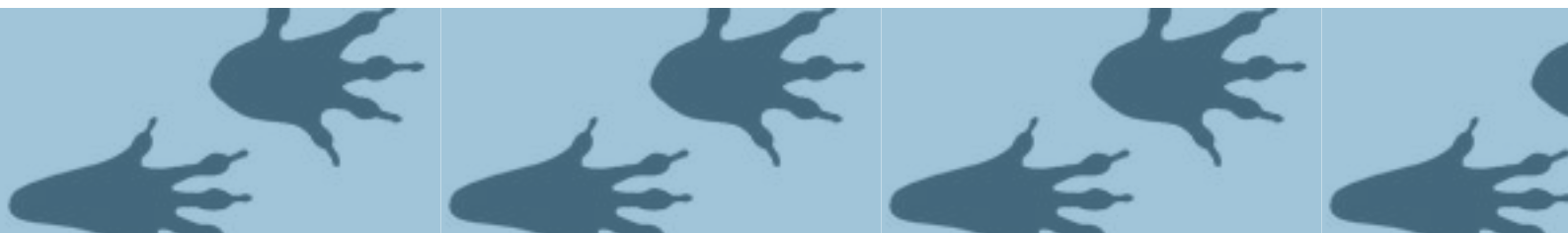


July 2018

# Western European Hedgehog (*Erinaceus europaeus*)

## Quick facts...

- Hedgehogs are native and although commonly found in parts of Dorset, they are in decline across the UK despite being protected under UK law.
- The State of Britain's Hedgehog report (2015) suggests a significant and continued decline in rural and urban landscapes.
- Whilst found in a wide range of habitats, hedgehogs are now largely urban and suburban dwellers and most often encountered in gardens and parks.
- The fall in hedgehog numbers is thought to be due to a combination of reasons including pesticides, loss and fragmentation of habitats in rural areas and smaller, manicured gardens with impermeable fencing in urban environments and a high incidence of road mortality.
- Creating barriers such as fencing, using slug pellets, clearing vegetation and lighting bonfires are all activities that can potentially harm hedgehogs.
- Design, plan and garden with hedgehogs in mind; take part in projects such as the Dorset Mammal Group's Hedgehog Friendly Towns & Villages and the People's Trust for Endangered Species Hedgehog Street campaigns.
- Record sightings of hedgehogs and send them to the Dorset Environmental Records Centre<sup>1</sup> or add them to Living Record online. If you find an injured hedgehog contact The British Hedgehog Preservation Society<sup>2</sup> for advice.



# Legal Protection and Planning Policy

- Hedgehogs are listed on Schedule 6 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act (1981) (as amended) which makes it illegal to kill or capture wild hedgehogs using certain methods<sup>3</sup>;
- they are also covered against cruel treatment under the Wild Mammals Protection Act (1996);
- and are included as a species of principal importance within the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006) which bestows a duty to public bodies to have regard to the conservation of biodiversity<sup>4</sup>;
- they are also identified as a Priority Species in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UK BAP); updated by the Report on the Species and Habitats Review (2007) and now superseded by the UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework (2012)<sup>5</sup>.
- With respect to development the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2012) sets out the mitigation hierarchy - avoid impacts where possible; mitigate against impacts if they cannot be avoided and provide compensation if mitigation is not possible. In addition, the NPPF promotes the provision of enhancements in stating '*opportunities to incorporate biodiversity in and around development should be encouraged*'.



# Ecology

The Western European Hedgehog (*Erinaceus europaeus*) is a small largely nocturnal mammal covered in defensive spines. They are known to use a range of habitats and are widely distributed in England and Ireland. In rural landscapes hedgehogs inhabit woodland edges and hedgerows but are scarce or absent in upland, moorland, wetland and coniferous woodland habitats.

They are most often to be spotted in gardens and parks in urban areas where they take cover under shrubs and hedges during the day before emerging to feed on invertebrates, (particularly earthworms, slugs and snails, amphibians and bird eggs), at dusk. They live above ground and build their sleeping, breeding and hibernation nests in dense cover provided by twigs, leaves and other debris.

Hedgehogs are very mobile and are known to range between 1-2km<sup>6</sup> in a night often visiting several different gardens and traversing entire neighbourhoods. As they forage and commute they tend to follow linear features such as hedges.

They generally hibernate from November to the end of March when food is less readily available. On emerging in the spring hedgehogs breed primarily from April to September with peak activity taking place in May and June. Young are born usually between May and August in nests consisting of leaves and grass. At around five weeks the young are weaned and independent but nests are susceptible to disturbance which may result in the young being abandoned or eaten by the parent.

## Status

Although still widespread hedgehogs are no longer abundant. Their numbers are thought to be falling because of pesticides, development and habitat loss which can result in the removal of hedgerows and agricultural practices become increasingly intensified, leading to a reduction in nesting and foraging opportunities.

Since 2000, rural populations have declined by at least a half and urban populations by up to a third in the same period<sup>7</sup>.

## Surveying

The optimum period to survey for hedgehogs is between May and September when they are active.

A licence from Natural England will be required to survey by trapping, or taking by the use of an artificial light (such as a torch). A licence is not required for surveys that rely upon searching for field signs; direct observation or presence/likely absence surveys using techniques that do not involve trapping or handling such as footprint tunnels or camera traps.

For more information about survey competencies please refer to the Chartered Institute of Environmental Managers and Ecologists (CIEEM) technical guidance sheet<sup>8</sup>.

# Mitigation measures and good practice

When undertaking development or works that could result in harm to hedgehogs it is advisable to employ measures to safeguard animals, always follow best practice advice and ensure suitable habitat is available to them post works.

The potential impacts from development include injury or incidental mortality during construction. For this reason, the timing of vegetation clearance should take account of hedgehogs by being undertaken in winter months when they are likely to be in hibernation and therefore less likely to be present. If a hibernation nest is disturbed it should be re-covered with a thick layer of leaves.

Areas of longer grass should be cut in stages to allow time to search for animals or give them the opportunity to disperse before cutting grass short.

Advice for managing land and making provision for hedgehogs in rural areas includes:

- keep hedges dense by cutting once every three years and on rotation so that no more than one third of hedges on a farm are cut in any one year;
- encourage growth at the base of hedges by allowing a field margin;
- 'gap-up' hedges with additional planting and laying rather than coppicing;
- allow small areas of undisturbed scrub such as bramble to establish;
- do not allow ditches to develop steep sides which may trap hedgehogs
- provide a means of ramped escape at cattle grids and replace broken drain covers;
- minimise the use of pesticides close to field margins where hedgehogs feed on invertebrates.

General best practice should be followed as routine and all housing developments should provide:

- areas of suitably managed green space;
- gaps under gates and permeable fencing, a hole the size of a CD is enough to allow the free movement of small mammals between gardens;
- wherever possible new native species-rich hedgerows that connect with the wider landscape should be planted and should also be subject to a long-term suitable management regime.;
- information and identification of environmental good practice for residents.

Gardeners can also help hedgehogs by:

- allowing leaves and dead wood to form a pile in an undisturbed, sheltered area and installing a hedgehog nest box;
- avoiding chemicals and slug pellets;
- covering open drains and gullies and providing a means of escape from garden ponds;
- gardening to encourage a range of invertebrates;
- only building bonfires on clear ground away from leaf litter and only on the day of lighting –checking the bonfire before it is lit;
- providing a feeding station and a source of water.

More information and advice about gardening for hedgehogs can be found on The British Hedgehog Preservation Society<sup>2</sup> website.

# References, resources & definitions

<sup>1</sup> Dorset Environmental Records Centre (DERC) [www.derc.org.uk](http://www.derc.org.uk) / 01305 225081 / [derc@dorsetcc.gov.uk](mailto:derc@dorsetcc.gov.uk)  
Living Record [www.livingrecord.net](http://www.livingrecord.net)

<sup>2</sup> [www.britishhedgehogs.org.uk](http://www.britishhedgehogs.org.uk) / [info@britishhedgehogs.org.uk](mailto:info@britishhedgehogs.org.uk) / 01584 890 801

<sup>3</sup> The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) transposes into UK law the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (commonly the 'Bern Convention').

i) Hedgehogs are protected under Schedule 6 the Act from *'being killed or taken by certain methods under Section 11(1) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. The methods listed are: self-locking snares, bows, crossbows, explosives (other than ammunition for a firearm), or live decoys. The species listed are also protected from the following activities: trap, snare or net, electrical device for killing or stunning, poisonous, poisoned or stupefying substances or any other gas or smoke, automatic or semi-automatic weapon, device for illuminating a target or sighting device for night shooting, artificial light, mirror or other dazzling device, sound recording, and mechanically propelled vehicle in immediate pursuit.'*

<sup>4</sup> *'Local authorities have a Duty to have regard to the conservation of biodiversity in exercising their functions. This Duty was introduced by the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act and came into force on 1 October 2006. The Duty affects all public authorities and aims to raise the profile and visibility of biodiversity, to clarify existing commitments with regard to biodiversity, and to make it a natural and integral part of policy and decision making. Conserving biodiversity includes restoring and enhancing species populations and habitats, as well as protecting them.'* (DEFRA 2007).

<sup>5</sup> JNCC and Defra (on behalf of the Four Countries' Biodiversity Group). 2012. UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework. July 2012. Available from: <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-5170>

<sup>6</sup> Hedgehog. People's Trust for Endangered Species. Available from <https://ptes.org/get-informed/facts-figures/hedgehog/>

<sup>7</sup> State of Britain's Hedgehogs report (2015). Available from <https://ptes.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/SoBH-2015.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Competencies for Species Survey: European Hedgehog (2013) CIEEM available at [https://www.cieem.net/data/files/Resource\\_Library/Technical\\_Guidance\\_Series/CSS/CSS\\_-\\_HEDGEHOG\\_April\\_2013.pdf](https://www.cieem.net/data/files/Resource_Library/Technical_Guidance_Series/CSS/CSS_-_HEDGEHOG_April_2013.pdf)



# Contact



For more information please contact the Natural Environment Team  
[net@dorsetcc.gov.uk](mailto:net@dorsetcc.gov.uk) / 01305 224931 / 01305 225039