



Let
Nature In!
Hedgehogs



Ulster
Wildlife





Get to know our Spiny Friends



Small, brown and famously covered in spines, the hedgehog is one of Northern Ireland's most familiar wild mammals. They are very well liked and were voted Britain's favourite mammal. They are great to have around, as they feed on garden pests and are always a pleasure to watch.

Size

Length: 15-30cm, Weight: up to 2kg



Identification

Hedgehogs are very recognisable, but sometimes you will see signs rather than the animal itself. Look out for the signs of hedgehogs - medium-sized, black droppings consisting of bits of beetles and other insects. There might also be remains of their snacks, like bits of snail shells. Large leaf piles being dragged about could be a sign they are nesting or preparing to hibernate.

Habitat and Ecology

They are solitary, nocturnal animals, which emerge after dark to forage for food. They can occasionally be seen in the daytime, however. They like areas with plenty of diversity as this provides shelter and a food source. When it starts to get colder hedgehogs will hibernate, usually from November to March, but this is weather dependant. They create nests out of dead leaves, log piles, or under bushes. Adult hedgehogs travel between 1-2km per night over home ranges as big as 10-20 hectares in size. In suburban areas, this means they range over entire housing estates and neighbourhoods.

Diet

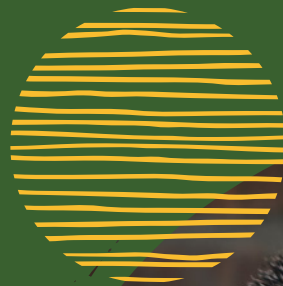
Hedgehogs eat a variety of invertebrates including beetles, millipedes and caterpillars. They may also eat amphibians, bird's eggs or carrion as they are opportunistic feeders. Their diet also includes slug and snails which make them a welcome sight for keen gardeners. They are very noisy eaters and sometimes you hear them before you see them. It is important to not use slug pellets, as these can have fatal consequences for hedgehogs.

If you want hedgehogs, you need creepy crawlies in abundance which can be attracted by planting a variety of different plants and creating habitats, such as log piles.

Reproduction

Hedgehogs reach sexual maturity when they are two years old. Hedgehogs can begin mating in March or April when they emerge from hibernation, but the most common time is May and June when males pursue females. During the breeding season amorous hedgehogs can be seen (and heard!) circling each other with snorts and grunts. Females will flatten their spines for mating to occur.

The young are called hoglets and are born with their spines sheathed beneath their skin, which then emerge a few hours after birth - usually 4-6 hoglets are born. After 3-4 weeks the young will go on foraging trips with their mother. After approximately 10 weeks they will disperse. Hedgehogs can have a second litter later in the year, but these young are less likely to survive.



Why do hedgehogs need protection???

Hedgehogs are disappearing across Britain and Europe, and we believe the situation is similar here, in Northern Ireland.

We have all noticed how little we see them these days. Sadly, for some of us, the only time we will ever see a hedgehog is following a collision with traffic.

Hedgehogs face many pressures and threats; loss of habitats from agricultural intensification and development leading to loss of hedgerows, wild spaces, and suitable gardens. They are also under threat from road development and increased traffic. The use of slug pellets in gardens has fatal consequences for hedgehogs, and they are also prone to drowning in garden ponds.

But there is hope

A recent UK report indicates that the decline in our towns and cities may be slowing, suggesting the actions that people are taking in their own neighbourhoods could be making a real difference.

This makes it even more important that we start taking action here, in Northern Ireland, before it's too late. Giving hedgehogs space to thrive, as well as building a better picture of their numbers is essential.

Conservation status

In Ireland, the hedgehog is classed as Least Concern on the IUCN red list but this is due to the fact that the species is data deficient. They are now classed as Vulnerable to Extinction in Britain. There have been huge declines in Britain and Europe, and it is estimated that there is a similar situation in Ireland.

Protection status

Hedgehogs are protected under Schedule 6 of the Wildlife (NI) Order 1985 - as animals that may not be killed or taken by certain methods.

FOR EVERY
30 hedgehogs
IN THE UK IN 1950,
THERE IS ONLY ONE LEFT
IN 2021.



What is Ulster Wildlife doing?

One of the major issues we face here, in Northern Ireland, is data deficiency around hedgehogs – we just don't know exactly how under threat hedgehogs are.

Starting in 2021, we plan on increasing our baseline knowledge of their numbers in Northern Ireland through annual surveys, in conjunction with the Irish Hedgehog Survey.

In addition to this, Ulster Wildlife provides the public with information, support and advice on helping hedgehogs in our neighbourhoods - both on our website and through advice calls and emails to members of the public.

By working together, we can build a better picture of their numbers in Northern Ireland and in turn, help secure their future.

Find out more about how you can get involved, record your sightings and sign up for the Annual Hedgehog Survey

www.ulsterwildlife.org/hedgehogs





WHAT YOU CAN DO

Gardening for Hedgehogs

Gardens are an all-important habitat for hedgehogs. By gardening in a wildlife-friendly way, we can help our spiky companions move around safely and find a home.

CHOOSE PLANT SPECIES THAT ARE ATTRACTIVE TO A RANGE OF INSECTS

Have a look at the RHS Perfect for Pollinators list for suggestions: rhs.org.uk/perfectforpollinators



MULCH BEDS WITH GARDEN COMPOST

Encourages plenty of earthworms, woodlice and beetles as it begins to rot down!



FALLEN LEAF PILE

Provides the perfect shelter for ground beetles.



WOOD PILE

Encourages a rich feast of earwigs, centipedes and woodlice!



ALLOW A PATCH OF GRASS TO GROW LONG

This will harbour lots of insects – a hedgehog's main food source.



'BUILD A BUG HOTEL'

Stuff it with lots of straw and hollow plant stems and earwigs, centipedes and woodlice will soon make it their home. See pages 8/9 for our guide.



LEAVE HOLLOW PLANT STEMS OVER WINTER

The perfect hiding place for ladybirds!



CREATE NESTING OPPORTUNITIES

Leave prunings and leaves in a wild corner for hedgehogs to make nests with. Hogs love apple and cherry leaves, and hawthorn and honeysuckle prunings make good structural supports.



WHAT YOU CAN DO

Welcoming Hedgehogs

To save the hedgehog, we need people to make small changes that will make a big difference. Your garden or green space can help hedgehogs thrive!

CREATE HEDGEHOG HIGHWAYS

Hedgehogs need to be able to roam far and wide in search of food, mates and nesting sites. Get together with your neighbours to cut a 13cm x 13cm (5in) hole in your fence or dig a channel beneath garden boundaries to connect your gardens. See pages 8/9 for our guide.

AVOID THE USE OF PESTICIDES

Ditch the slug pellets and avoid the use of pesticides. Hedgehogs are natural “pest” controllers and need a plentiful and varied supply of invertebrate prey to stay healthy.

MAKE WATER SAFE

Hedgehogs are great swimmers but can sometimes struggle to climb out of steep-sided ponds and may drown. Provide a ramp from a plank wrapped in chicken wire, add large stones or create shallow areas at the edge so they can scramble out.

BE AWARE OF DANGERS

Check for hidden hedgehogs before strimming, mowing the lawn or lighting bonfires.

PROVIDE NESTING SITES

Log and leaf piles, wilderness areas and purpose-built hedgehog homes make great places for hedgehogs to nest and hibernate. Fallen leaves also make the perfect nesting material, so make sure you don't clear all of these away. Or build a hedgehog house, see pages 8/9 for our guide.

PUT OUT FOOD AND WATER

During colder weather or dry times, the invertebrates that form the bulk of the hedgehog diet may become scarce, so supplemental feeding is helpful. Place a shallow dish of water and leave food out. There are brands of hedgehog food, but wet cat or dog food is suitable.

DO NOT FEED HEDGEHOGS MILK.

They are lactose intolerant. You can also consider a feeding station – find out more at hedgehogstreet.org/help-hedgehogs/feed-hedgehogs/



Activities

How to make an animal footprint trap

You will need:

- old baking tray



- long ruler



- fine grain sand



- low-sided dish



- footprint ID guide



- 1 Fill an old baking tray with damp sand and smooth out the surface with a ruler.

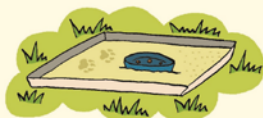


Check to make sure your fingers leave a mark.

- 2 Place hedgehog food or meaty cat or dog food in a low-sided dish in the middle of the tray.



- 3 Leave the trap overnight in a garden and check in the morning for footprints left by curious visitors.



hedgehog



fox



cat



bird



squirrel

Illustration: Corinne Welch © Copyright Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts 2015

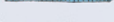
How to make a hedgehog highway

You will need

- A fence panel



- Ruler



- Pencil



- Coping saw



- Sandpaper



Talk to your neighbour! It's important to get their consent to cut a hole in the fence - explain that hedgehogs need to move between gardens to access enough food.

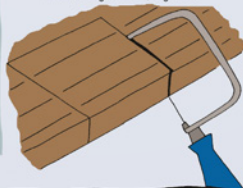
- 1 If your neighbour is happy, remove your fence panel.



- 2 Measure and mark a 13cm x 13cm hole at the bottom of the panel.



- 3 Ask an adult to help you cut the hole using the coping saw.



- 4 If there are any very rough edges, use the sand paper to smooth them down.



- 5 Put your fence panel back. Your hedgehog highway is now open for business!

You could set up your own trail cam to watch and see if any animals are using your highway.



Illustration: Corinne Welch © Copyright Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts 2015

Leave your garden wild

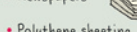
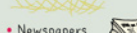
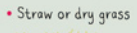
Take a day off today and do nothing! Leave a wild spot in your garden by not mowing the lawn, or not weeding the paving – nature will love it!



Make a deluxe hedgehog house

You will need

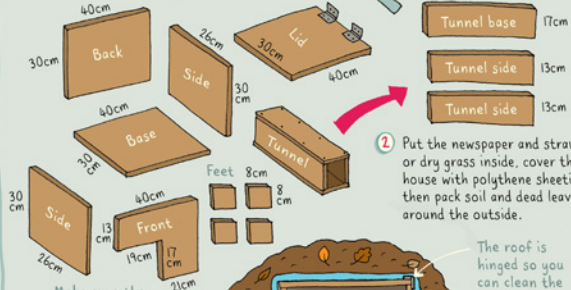
- 20mm FSC plywood boards cut to the sizes shown
- Hammer and nails
- 2 metal hinges
- Soil
- Dry leaves
- Straw or dry grass
- Newspapers
- Polythene sheeting



Do not creosote or treat the wood

Birch is ideal

1 Construct the hedgehog house from the following diagram and dimensions.



2 Put the newspaper and straw or dry grass inside, cover the house with polythene sheeting, then pack soil and dead leaves around the outside.

Make sure the entrance tunnel faces south, and is kept clear at all times

The roof is hinged so you can clean the box in future



raised up on feet

Hedgehog FAQ's

Here are a selection of the most common enquiries we get about hedgehogs

I have a hedgehog in my garden

Fantastic, register your sighting either through the Irish Hedgehog Survey irishhedgehogsurvey.com/ **record-sighting**, or to the Centre for Environmental Data recording nmni.com/CEDaR/CEDaR-submitting-records.aspx

I have a hedgehog in my garden but it looks injured

See 'Hedgehogs that need help' (p.11) for advice on when a hedgehog needs help and some local organisations and volunteers that you can contact.

I have spotted a dead hedgehog

Road traffic accidents are a significant threat to hedgehogs, and it can be very sad to see them on the road. Please do take some time to report the sighting; it helps to better understand the threats that hedgehogs are facing and in the long-term, could ensure more protections are put in place.

I have seen a hedgehog and it is covered in ticks and fleas

Hedgehog fleas are host specific and won't survive long on other species (us or our pets!). Sometimes they may become infested, but a few fleas or ticks will do them no harm. If concerned, seek help - see 'Hedgehogs that need help' (p.11)

Is my cat/dog a threat to hedgehogs?

Dogs can and sometimes do attack hedgehogs. Adults will be protected by

their spines, but sick or young hedgehogs may be killed. Try to keep dogs away from any hedgehogs in your garden, as an encounter could lead to both animals being hurt. You can help by warning hedgehogs visiting your garden when the dog is being let out e.g. turn on an outside light a minute or so before letting the dog out. Ideally, keep them on a lead at night. Cats will usually leave hedgehogs alone after investigating them.

Do badgers and foxes eat hedgehogs

Badgers are one of the main predators of hedgehogs in some parts of the UK, but they do not seem to have the same impact in Northern Ireland as badger densities are lower here. They are the only animal strong enough to tackle a hedgehog's spines and sometimes hedgehogs will avoid areas where badgers live. However, we have seen footage in Northern Irish gardens of both hedgehogs and badgers feeding in the same area! Foxes sometimes attack hedgehogs, although usually adults are protected by their spines. Hoglets can be vulnerable to foxes. Mostly, foxes and hedgehogs live happily together.

Additional reading & resources:

rhs.org.uk – Great planting for wildlife resources

hedgehogstreet.org – Hedgehog Street is a campaign by People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) and the British Hedgehog Preservation Society (BHPS) aimed at ensuring the hedgehog, the UK's only spiny mammal, remains a common and familiar part of our lives.

Hedgehogs that need help

Covered with flies/ticks
Wobbly, unstable, lethargic
Injured or breathing problems

Carefully collect with gloves, keep warm in box, take to local Vet or contact a wildlife rescue volunteer or organisation (below).

Orphaned hoglet

Are you sure? Was it found out of nest with no mother nearby, nest destroyed, or mother killed/injured. Seek help.

Trapped

Can you get it out safely? If you can't, seek help.

You have disturbed a hedgehog

Leave alone, if you have moved something & disturbed the animal, put it back; unless the nest is in danger or has been abandoned (sometimes adults leave & return, so be sure before removing) then seek help.

Hedgehogs that should be left alone

Foraging, & looks uninjured (Summer)

Hedgehogs are nocturnal, but you may see them out in the daylight.

Adult females in summer that are uninjured but found out in daylight may be nursing or moving young. Leave out a small dish of water and some dog or cat food. Keep pets away!

Foraging, & looks uninjured (Winter)

Healthy hedgehogs will often rouse from hibernation for short periods even in cold winter weather.

If they look weak in winter they may not be strong enough to hibernate. Seek help. Leave out a small dish of water and some dog or cat food. Keep pets away!

Hedgehog Rescue & Rehabilitation websites

ulsterwildlife.org/contact-us for list of orgs & individuals who can help
irishwildlifematters.ie/animals/hedgehog.html
hedgehogstreet.org/sick-or-injured-hedgehog/
britishhedgehogs.org.uk/found-a-hedgehog/



Thank You!

Thank you for sharing your garden with nature! You'll be making a real difference for wildlife and playing your part in nature's recovery in Northern Ireland. Keep an eye out for your monthly e-zine with inspiration and tips to keep you making space for nature throughout the year.

Not already a member?

If you love wildlife and wild places, and believe they are worth protecting, join us today!
ulsterwildlife.org/membership



Ulster Wildlife is Northern Ireland's largest local nature conservation charity. We're working to create a future where nature is protected, connected, restored, and is part of our daily lives.

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