

Hedgehog *Erinaceus europaeus*

Hedgehogs are listed as vulnerable to extinction on the Mammal Society Red List (2018), though this report also highlights the need for more data. According to The State of Britain's Hedgehogs 2022 hedgehog numbers in urban areas declined by 25% between 2000 -2010 but since then the population appears stable and possibly recovering, though from a low baseline. In rural areas however surveys show a steeper population decline: 30-75% in the last 20 years with the population now 20% of what it was in 2002. See (<https://www.hedgehogstreet.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/SoBH-2022-Final.pdf>)

Hedgehogs are a Bromley Species Action Plan Species. See https://www.bromley.gov.uk/info/200023/conservation/1573/bromley_biodiversity_species_action_plan_hedgehog

For a hedgehog population to be sustainable it needs a minimum of 30 animals and at least 90 hectares (over 200 acres) of continuous well-connected parks and gardens (Morris, P., 2014). This means that people can make a difference in improving hedgehog numbers by making their gardens more hedgehog friendly, connecting them to other gardens and greenspaces and encouraging more wildlife friendly management of all greenspaces including parks, allotments, school and sports grounds.

Hedgehogs are solitary animals except when raising young. They are nocturnal and during spring, summer and autumn spend the daytime sleeping in nests of leaves, waking at dusk to hunt for invertebrates such as slugs, snails, beetles, earwigs, worms, caterpillars, and millipedes. They change their nests frequently, especially male animals, and in summer sometimes just hide in tussocky grass. Hedgehogs have poor eyesight, relying more on an acute sense of smell, touch and hearing and travel 1-2 kms/night searching for food. Male animals may travel further when in search of mates. They mate in April/May, then the male leaves the female. She gives birth to 3-5 blind, pink young about month later in a special maternity nest of leaves and grass. The babies quickly develop soft white spines; their familiar brown spines only appear after the first week of life. They open their eyes at about 14 days old. Their mother takes them out on their first foraging trip at about 4 weeks and continues to suckle them until they can hunt for themselves. By 6 weeks they should be independent and will leave the nest area.

In winter (November-mid March) when less food is available, hedgehogs hibernate in a nest of dead leaves and grass beneath deep leaf litter in woodland or beneath hedgerows, scrub or even garden sheds. Their body temperature drops from about 35°C to 10°C or less, their heart rate slows from about 190 beats/minute to about 20 and their respiration rate to 1 breathe every few minutes. They do wake occasionally during winter and may move to or even build another nest on mild winter nights before sinking back into hibernation. If they weigh less than 450gms (1lb) they will not survive hibernation, so if you find a small hedgehog in autumn advice should be sought from a local expert (see page 3 below) or the British Hedgehog Preservation Society at www.britishhedgehogs.org.uk

An adult hedgehog has 5,000-7,000 spines. When threatened it raises its spines and rolls into a tight ball. If it isn't quick enough, a dog, fox or even a cat can grab its back legs and prevent it from rolling up properly. If they survive their first year they may live for another 4-5 years. Some individuals have been recorded as reaching 10 years.

Threats to hedgehogs in London Borough of Bromley

- Climate change:
 - Hedgehogs are particularly vulnerable to dehydration so may die during spells of hot, dry weather.
 - Variable winter temperatures cause hedgehogs to come out of hibernation more often when there is little for them to feed on.
- Decline in invertebrate numbers and decline in foraging areas (rough grassland, hedgerows, scrub- within gardens foraging areas lost to paving & decking).
- Loss of habitat for nesting/hibernating- scrub, wild undisturbed areas.
- Habitat fragmentation –wider, faster and more roads and secure gardens with lack of access for hedgehogs.
- Pesticides, which reduce insect prey and accumulate in insect predators e.g. hedgehogs.
- Hazards such as ponds with straight sides, netting and litter-especially cans and cups with remains of food in them.
- Gardens with steep sided changes in levels where hedgehogs can become trapped in small areas with steep sides.
- Use of strimmers on long grass or scrub where they may be sleeping during the day.
- Badgers sometimes predate hedgehogs- they are the only UK species able to open the tight ball hedgehogs present when under threat. They also have a similar diet and therefore compete for food. However, badgers and hedgehogs have co-existed for millenia, it is human activity that is a far more important threat, see <https://ptes.org/hedgehogsandbadgers>

Actions needed

- Provide fresh water for hedgehogs (and other animals and birds) especially during hot weather.
- Publicise the ongoing survey and encourage people to submit records, especially from under recorded areas e.g. Beckenham, Langley Park, Eden Park, Elmers End, Penge, St. Paul's Cray, St. Mary Cray, parts of Orpington and Biggin Hill.
- Continue to send records to bromleybiodiversity@gmail.com. Additional details, e.g. evidence of breeding very welcome. Records received will be sent to GiGL (with no personal details) and are then sent on to Hedgehog Street. **NB please do send us your records directly as these make it possible to carry out local actions e.g in nearby parks and other greenspaces.**
- If there is a planning application near a garden or other site known to be visited by hedgehogs (see maps) ask Bromley's Planners to request developers to include mitigation for hedgehogs in the development as part of the 'Biodiversity Net Gain' which developers are required to address. See [Simple Search \(bromley.gov.uk\)](https://www.bromley.gov.uk) for details of planning applications. Please also let Bromley Biodiversity Partnership Sub-group know at bromleybiodiversity@gmail.com so they can also contact the planners.
- Where possible link your gardens with those of your neighbours, back alleys, paths bordered by scrub or long grass, any nearby greenspaces e.g. parks, school and sports grounds, Churchyards, cemeteries and allotments. All you need is a hole measuring about 13 x 13cms through or under your garden fence, and to make sure that the hole doesn't become blocked, for example by leaves in autumn. It is essential to provide safe corridors along which hedgehogs can travel and forage, minimising their use of roads. See www.hedgehogstreet.org and click on, 'highways for hedgehogs' for more details.

- Make sure you have areas within your garden, park, allotment, sports or school grounds that are undisturbed, with long grass and some scrub.
- If hedgehogs visit your garden provide them with some water to drink and maybe dog or cat food, but do not give them bread or milk because they cannot digest them.
- Check long grass or scrubby areas for hedgehogs before cutting or strimming.
- Don't clear away all the dead leaves in autumn, leave some in a sheltered area out of the wind, preferably adjacent to a hedge or scrub where a hedgehog can hibernate undisturbed.
- If you have a bonfire, check before burning it.
- Hedgehogs die in steep sided ponds because they can't get out. Make sure ponds have at least one gently sloping bank that a hedgehog can use to climb out. With existing steep sided ponds add a ramp (not too steep and ridged to allow a good foothold), or add stones and/or water plants (preferably native) along one side to make a gradual slope.
- Hedgehogs can become trapped in small areas with steep sides so if your garden has steep sided changes in levels leave a ramp in place if you are going away (e.g. a plank of wood- not too steep).
- Remove litter-especially cans and cups containing food remains as hedgehogs will go into them to drink or feed and can become trapped by their prickles when trying to reverse.
- Consider planting a hedge of native species. This will support some of the invertebrates hedgehogs need and as the hedge matures, if it is well maintained, with a thick base, it will provide them with a home and a safe place to hibernate.
- Make sure no pesticides or slug pellets are used near any scrub, wild areas or hedgerows.
- Hedgehogs quite often become entangled with wire or plastic netting leading to severe cutting of their legs as they struggle to break free, so please ensure any wire or plastic netting is at a safe height for hedgehogs (30cms above soil level) and all nets, including football and tennis nets are stored away when not in use.
- Consider making a hibernation or nesting box for hedgehogs. Place in a suitable place beneath logs and/or dead leaves for extra safety and insulation. See wildlife websites e.g. The Wildlife Trusts, RSPB, Woodland Trust to find out more.

If you see a sick or injured hedgehog or a hedgehog in daylight (a sign that the animal may be unwell), please contact Mavis Righini on 020 8462 1168 or Willow Wildlife Rescue on 07858 227 337 (<https://www.willowwildlife.co.uk/>) for help and advice.

For further information on how to help hedgehogs visit the British Hedgehog Preservation Society website www.britishhedgehogs.org.uk and www.hedgehogstreet.org

Biodiversity Partnership Species & Habitats Sub-group

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References

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