

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. Between 2000 and 2015 hedgehog populations in England fell by more than 50% in rural areas; 33% in urban areas (see 'The State of British Hedgehogs 2015' published by the People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTES)). When the PTES looked at hedgehog survey data 2015-2017, it appeared to show that in urban areas hedgehog numbers were no longer declining. 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 soil 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 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 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

- 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 also accumulate in insect predators such as 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.

In Bromley, four years of surveying (2017-2020) has highlighted a few areas in the borough where records have been sent from several gardens. These records were generally near areas of open space, e.g around Poverest/Covet Wood, Darrick & Newstead Woods, Chislehurst, open areas in West Wickham, and in a wider area from Bromley Common to Jubilee CP in one direction and eastwards to Parkfield Rec. and Crofton Woods.

Some records have been generated following articles in local newsletters, e.g an article about the hedgehog survey in The Petts Wood Gazette and one in the West Wickham Residents Newsletter. The latter led to records from gardens around West Wickham football and cricket club near Corkscrew Hill with some closer to Langley Park Golf Course. Articles were sent to other residents' groups in 2019. In addition to the records submitted by members of the public, 3 sites: Downe Orchard, Jail Lane and Clockhouse Orchard were surveyed by Sue Holland and Steven Lofting of *idverde*/RSPB in 2018 using hedgehog footprint tunnels baited with dog food, but no hedgehog footprints were recorded. Strawberry Bank, Pratts Bottom and Den Barn were surveyed in 2019 with a similar lack of results.

In 2018 and 2019 leaflets were posted targeting streets where hedgehogs had been sighted, giving advice on how to help hedgehogs as they travel through their gardens and green spaces to encourage reporting of further sightings and gardening in a wildlife friendly way.

Unfortunately much of the work planned for 2020, including working with some schools had to be cancelled due to Covid but very many thanks to everyone who sent in records this year. We received a greater number of sightings in 2020 than in earlier years- 36 in 2020 compared to 10 in 2017, 21 in 2018 and 33 in 2019.

As the maps show, within the borough there are few records from rural areas where there tend to be less people to submit records, but there is also a lack of records in some more urban areas e.g. Beckenham, Langley Park, Eden Park, Elmers End, the Bethlem Hospital area, Sundridge, Downham, Penge, St. Paul's Cray, St. Mary Cray and Biggin Hill. There is a need to better publicise the ongoing survey and encourage more people to submit records in these areas.

All Bromley's records have been submitted to Greenspace for Greater London (GiGL) and will be sent to Hedgehog Street. We have mapped the records we have been sent (attached) and are looking at the maps to see how it may be possible to link greenspaces. Please do what you can to 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.

Bromley Biodiversity Partnership will continue to ask for records during 2021, try to better publicise the hedgehog survey in under recorded areas and hope to be able to do more on the ground.

Meanwhile we have put together a list with a wide range of actions to suit a wide range of different people, circumstances and organisations. Any help to better care for hedgehogs will also benefit many other species, so biodiversity in general.

Actions needed (where COVID permits)

- 1) Please continue to send records to bromleybiodiversity@gmail.com. Any additional details, e.g. evidence of breeding very welcome. Records received will be sent to GiGL (with grid references, 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.
- 2) 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 \(bromley.gov.uk\)](http://Simple Search (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.
- 3) Publicise survey in under recorded areas as above.
- 4) Hedgehogs travel quite long distances when looking for food, often 2kms or more every night, so make sure walls and fences at site boundaries have safe gaps for hedgehogs to pass through- a gap measuring 13cms x 13cms is sufficient. Ask your neighbours if you can make a gap between your gardens to enable a hedgehog to pass from one garden to the next. See www.hedgehogstreet.org and click on, 'highways for hedgehogs' for more details.
- 5) Make sure you have areas within your garden, park, allotment, sports or school grounds that are undisturbed, with long grass and some scrub.
- 6) 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. Leaving out water during hot dry weather is particularly important because hedgehogs quite often die from dehydration.
- 7) Check long grass or scrubby areas for hedgehogs before cutting or strimming.
- 8) 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.
- 9) If you have a bonfire, check any pile of brash etc. before burning it.
- 10) 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. If the pond has steep concrete or plastic sides, 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.
- 11) 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).

- 12) Don't leave / 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.
- 13) 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.
- 14) Make sure no pesticides or slug pellets are used near any scrub, wild areas or hedgerows left for hedgehogs.
- 15) 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.
- 16) Consider making a hibernation 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.
- 17) If you see a sick or injured hedgehog or a hedgehog in daylight (as sign that the animal may be unwell), please contact Mavis Righini on 020 8462 1168 or Willow Wildlife on 020 8857 7495 or 07956472284 and ask their advice.

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

Thank-you so much for what you have done, we look forward to hearing from you in 2021.

Bromley Biodiversity Partnership Species & Habitats Sub-group.
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References

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