

2. Hedgehogs and Other Mammals



This sheet gives information about hedgehogs, our partnership to promote them and guidelines on how to manage a burial site to benefit hedgehogs and other mammals.

FLAGSHIP SPECIES

Hedgehogs need our help – numbers have declined in the last few decades, down by 50% in rural areas and around 30% in our towns and cities. Burial grounds can really help their survival, and with some extra care, your site could become a place where hedgehogs nest, feed or hibernate.

The hedgehog is a flagship species of Caring for God's Acre.

We are working with the People's Trust for Endangered Species and the British Hedgehog Preservation Society to encourage hedgehogs in burial grounds.

KNOW YOUR HEDGEHOG

Hedgehogs are found across most of Britain including towns and cities, particularly those with a network of burial grounds, parks and gardens.

Hedgehog spines are actually modified hairs so that when a hedgehog curls up it presents a complete ball of prickles. The hedgehog's face, chest, belly and legs are not spiny but have coarse grey-brown fur.

Hedgehogs are rightly valued by gardeners for eating pests. They feed primarily on beetles, caterpillars, earthworms, earwigs, slugs and snails. They are an opportunistic species and occasionally eat carrion or fallen fruit.

Hedgehogs are nocturnal and could be present without anyone realising. They tend to forage for food over quite a wide area, travelling 1 to 2 miles in a night and can have home ranges up to 40 acres, so it's vital that they have continuous access to as many greenspaces as possible, including burial grounds.

They have a good sense of smell but poor eyesight, and are inquisitive, which can lead them into places where they may get stuck.

Hedgehogs tend to be solitary animals apart from the breeding season when males seek out females. Courtship is a noisy affair and following mating the male leaves the female to raise her young unaided. The young hoglets

are born from May through to September with 2 to 6 hoglets in a litter. They stay in the nest for the first four weeks or so, after which time they begin to be weaned and are led on night-time foraging trips by their mother. Shortly after this the youngsters will leave the nest of their own accord and the family separates.

Hedgehogs hibernate from late autumn onwards (depending on the weather) in a nest made from old dry leaves, grass and other vegetation. This may be at the base of a hedge, in a compost heap, amongst tree roots or under piles of logs.

Whilst in hibernation the hedgehog's body slows down and it becomes immobile. It then wakes and emerges in the spring, timing again depending on the weather and on how long fat reserves last. Hedgehogs will move periodically between nests during this time.



Hedge Parsley

HELPING HEDGEHOGS

There are many things which you can do to encourage hedgehogs and to give them a good chance of thriving.

Food and shelter

Try to have a variety of grass heights including long and tussocky grass (see sheet A2, Caring for Grassland), hedges instead of fences and areas which are not too tidy.

Piles of deadwood, slowly rotting away, are an excellent food source, full of beetles and worms.

Compost heaps are also rich with food. Hedgehogs use compost heaps and hedge bottoms for nesting and hibernating. They also make use of leaf piles, tussocky grass, gaps in stonework, thickets of shrubs and gaps around tree roots. Provide a shallow dish of water in hot, dry weather.

Avoiding hazards

Hedgehogs can be injured or killed by a variety of hazards:

- Chemicals such as pesticides, slug pellets or wood preservatives are dangerous to hedgehogs. Hedgehogs may eat either



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the chemical or the killed pest and have been known to lick preservatives on fences. Try to use environmentally-friendly products.

- Be careful when forking a compost heap, strimming an area of tussocky grass or lighting a bonfire. Is there a hedgehog nesting or hibernating? Autumn is a good time to empty compost bins – hedgehogs have finished nesting but are not yet hibernating. Always build a bonfire pile on the day it is to be lit.
- Hedgehogs are able to swim but can get trapped in a pond or water container if the sides are too steep to climb. They can also fall into drains. Create an easy exit route using a piece of sloping wood or a pile of stones.

Help hedgehogs to move around

Hedgehogs and other mammals travel a daily route to find food and shelter and need quite a large area for this. Try to make it easy for them to get in and out of a site. A small gap at the bottom of a fence or avoiding fixing wire netting near to the ground will help. If you have stone walls around the site, you can either drill holes, make a tunnel underneath the wall, or make holes in adjoining gates. Hedgehogs stick to linear features so should eventually find any gaps that you have made – just make sure they are at least 13cm x 13cm. Trying to 'keep the hedgehog in' may actually keep them out.

Become a Hedgehog Champion on Hedgehog Street!

Tell us about hedgehogs in burial grounds

Caring for God's Acre, **People's Trust for Endangered Species** and **The British Hedgehog Preservation Society** would like to hear about any hedgehogs that

you find in burial grounds so please get in touch if you see a hedgehog (alive or dead) or hedgehog tracks in a burial ground. You can add your hedgehog sightings to the BIG Hedgehog Map.

Please tell us about other interesting mammals too!

OTHER MAMMALS COMMON TO BURIAL GROUNDS

Many other mammals either live within burial grounds or else visit on their regular ramblings. Moles and badgers feed on worms and other invertebrates. Badgers can cause problems digging up graves where the soil is loose (see sheet A9, Pesky Plants and Animals). Mice, voles and shrews feed on plants, flowers, berries and insects. Rabbits will graze the grassland. Squirrels may nest in the larger trees and feed within trees and shrubs throughout the site. These smaller mammals then attract predators: foxes, weasels, stoats and polecats hunting for mice and rabbits.

Helping other mammals

A variety of food sources through the year can be key to survival. Roots, grass, flowers, nuts, seeds and berries are all used by different animals. A mosaic of different grass heights provides both food and shelter.

Invertebrates from tiny midges to soil beetles, worms, slugs and snails are all food for mammals, and small mammals are food for larger ones.

Water can be critical to survival, particularly in times of drought. Can you put a shallow dish of water on site?



Wood Mouse

Useful contacts

British Hedgehog Preservation Society, www.britishhedgehogs.org.uk

Hedgehog Street, www.hedgehogstreet.org

People's Trust for Endangered Species, www.ptes.org

The Mammal Society, www.mammal.org.uk

Useful references

A Guide to British Mammal Tracks and Signs – Field Studies Council fold-out chart

Land Mammals of Britain – Field Studies Council fold-out chart



Grey Squirrel