

# Helping Hedgehogs in Buriton



Hedgehog numbers in Britain are in decline and in 2020 hedgehogs were classified as vulnerable to extinction. There are many threats to the hedgehog population.

In rural areas, intensive agriculture has led to the removal of hedgerows and trees, destroying and fragmenting habitat such as copses and hedges, resulting in fewer places to nest, hibernate and forage for food. The use of pesticides, fungicides and herbicides kill the hedgehog's natural diet of slugs, snails caterpillars, beetles, worms and other insects.

In urban and suburban areas, fences and walls prevent hedgehogs from travelling between gardens. Ponds, netting, strimmers and slug pellets are hazards. Paving over front gardens reduces food and shelter and forces hedgehogs onto roads to get to the next patch of green space. Construction of roads and motorways divides habitats and creates hazards. However, there are things that you can do to help.

Rarely seen daytime, hedgehogs' night-time wanderings take them through several gardens, feeding on a variety of invertebrates, the natural food that's best for hedgehogs. In the cold winter period hedgehogs hibernate but if you see one moving about during this time they may need a helping hand with supplementary food and water. This will encourage hedgehog visits at other times too.

Special hedgehog food is available or cat biscuits, meat-based dog or cat food are suitable, preferably chicken or turkey flavour. Kitten biscuits are perfect as they suit small mouths. Don't leave out bread or milk as they can't digest them: it upsets their stomachs and can dehydrate and kill hedgehogs. Don't leave out mealworms as they can contain high levels of Phosphorous which causes metabolic bone disease.

Hedgehogs need to move between gardens so it's useful to give them openings (about 12cm x 12cm) at boundaries. If your garden is contained by a fence or wall, make a small opening on each side, so that they can wander between neighbouring gardens. They hibernate in heaps of dead leaves and timber, compost or other garden waste, so try not to disturb these until hibernation ends in the Spring. Even then there may be baby hoglets in the nests so be careful not to disturb them, they are very vulnerable to predators.

The Peoples Trust for Endangered Species and the British Hedgehog Preservation Society have jointly launched a conservation project called Hedgehog Street. There are details at <https://www.hedgehogstreet.org/>

There is also more information at <https://www.britishhedgehogs.org.uk/> and <https://www.gardenersworld.com/garden-advice/hedgehogs-in-the-garden/>