

Keeping Hedgehogs Safe in Winter



You may have hedgehogs in your area without realising it. They are nocturnal creatures (sleep during the day and awake after dark) and just because you don't see them doesn't mean they aren't out and about at night when you are fast asleep.

We know that many people in our area are passionate about hedgehog welfare and will do everything they can to keep these wonderful creatures safe.

During the winter the main threats to hedgehogs are:

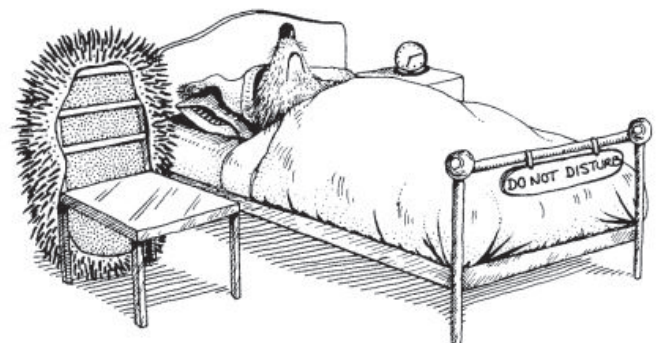
Starvation – Their natural food supply (earthworms, beetles, caterpillars and other insects) is very limited and they lose a great deal of their body weight. They need to be fed additional food otherwise they are likely to die

Hibernation nests being disturbed – As the weather gets colder (below 5 degrees C) and they have less natural food, many hedgehogs prepare to nest build for hibernation. They often build their nest under hedges, piles of brushwood, inside compost heaps, in thick bushes, bracken, dense shrubs and big leaf and log piles. They might make several nests in the same garden and a hibernation nest is usually very strong and sturdy. It is hard work to build, using lots of precious energy

Why do Hedgehogs Hibernate?

Hedgehogs hibernate to avoid the cold months of the year when food becomes scarce. During winter months they often use up more energy searching for food than the energy they get from the food itself.

Hibernation is more about conserving energy than sleeping. Prior to hibernating the hedgehog will be very busy building a nest. During hibernation the hedgehog becomes cold to the touch, it stops moving, it can stop breathing for long periods of time, its heart rate drops to around 20 beats per minute.



“Do not disturb a hibernating hedgehog”



Snuffles Hedgehog Rescue Four Oaks

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To wake up, the hedgehog needs to use its fat reserves, which warms the body and begins to get the blood flowing again. It is very important that they have enough fat reserves to survive hibernation. Generally a hedgehog may lose up to one third of its body weight during hibernation and therefore a recommended minimum weight of 600g is preferred to survive the winter. If a hedgehog has not reached a good weight before it hibernates, it will still go into hibernation but without the required fat reserves it is likely to die as it sleeps.

Hedgehogs usually hibernate between November and mid March but if the weather is mild many hedgehogs won't hibernate until the temperature is much lower. If the weather is changeable hedgehogs may go in and out of hibernation. If the weather is warm and food is put out for them every night, some hedgehogs do not feel the need to hibernate and will stay active all through the winter.

Young Hedgehogs over winter (Autumn Juveniles)

Many female hedgehogs have late litters in September and October and the young are known as autumn juveniles. By winter these hedgehogs are old enough to be away from their mothers, but are too small to hibernate or survive on their own. Most hedgehogs generally need to weigh at least 600g in order to hibernate successfully and be in a good enough condition to survive after hibernation. Some underweight hedgehogs in October will need to be taken in and cared for over winter and then released when the weather warms up in the spring and their natural food supply is plentiful.

How you can help hedgehogs in your area over winter

Feed them: you can help hedgehogs passing through your garden during the winter by feeding ½ a tin of meat based cat or dog food in jelly (not gravy) or the equivalent of meat based cat biscuits and sunflower hearts. Dry hedgehog food is available from many stockists but if you use Ark Wildlife (www.arkwildlife.co.uk) Snuffles will receive 5% of the cost as a donation.

Dry food is better in the freezing weather and a feeding station will keep it dry and prevent cats and other domestic pets eating the food. You can make or buy a hedgehog feeding station and always make sure there is fresh water (not milk) available. We sell hedgehog houses and feeding stations and you can complete the "contact us" page on our website for more details. Visit the "what I eat" page of our website for details of how to make a feeding station using an under the bed storage box



Do Not Disturb a sleeping or hibernating hedgehog: If you are clearing your garden of leaves, compost or wood piles or general garden maintenance please gently check you haven't got a hedgehog visitor fast asleep. **If you have, do not disturb the nest.**

If you see a hedgehog out during the day it needs immediate attention even if it looks OK as it may be starving or sick - Call Claire Hunt on 07889 770 958

***Cash donations can be made using paypal on our website or facebook page
For details visit the "How I can help" page on our website***