

It's that time of year again - Hedgehogs at risk

As you will know by now this is the second year of keeping hedgehog records in the village. When anyone lets us know about a sighting we add it to our records and to the hedgehog map. Our numbers of sightings are similar over the two years, as are the numbers of poorly hedgehogs and fatalities. There's still a lot to do to reduce the risks, such as avoiding the use of slug pellets, being very careful with strimmers and covering open drains. The RSPCA rescued a good-sized hog from being trapped down a stop-top access hole with a broken cover just a few weeks ago. It's also important to make sure there are holes in your garden fences so hedgehogs can move around freely (they can roam up to one or two kilometres at night in search of food...or a mate).

We are coming up to a particularly risky time for hedgehogs. It is now when hedgehogs should be eating well to put on weight for hibernation and they'll be looking for a safe place to over-winter.

So can you help?

Feeding hedgehogs can be really helpful, particularly at this time of year. Any of the following: Cat biscuits, Cat meat (without gravy and fish) and Clean water.

Places to sleep such as underneath sheds, wood piles, sturdy wooden boxes, hedge bottoms are all places that hedgehogs choose.

So when you're doing your Autumn garden tidying please take care and don't be too tidy. Maybe you could leave an untidy pile or two of brash at the edge of the garden, or even create a hedgehog house in a quiet sheltered corner of the garden. It only takes a sturdy wooden box or a pile of bricks shaped into a shelter, with an entrance of no less than 13 cm and a ventilation hole near the top.

Piles of leaves are also much loved by hedgehogs. So please don't be tempted to sweep them all up. Perhaps sweep them to the back of a border. The hedgehogs take them into their nests as bedding.

Much to our delight, in the late spring this year we saw several hedgehogs in the garden. These must have been the first sightings in our garden for at least twenty years. They didn't come every evening but when they did it was always around 10 p.m. We set up a wildlife camera and there they were snuffling round the garden and on occasions making a huge racket, grunting pig-like to each other. We put out cat biscuits and clean water and knew straight away that they had been drinking as the water in the morning was full of the dirt that had washed off their snouts. Now it might be a coincidence but this year we've had far fewer slugs than normal in the garden.....



Always optimistic, we decided to put a hedgehog hotel in a quiet, sheltered corner at the end of what seemed to be one of their favourite runs. With a handful of dry leaves in the chamber and few cat biscuits in the entrance we waited to see what would happen. For a few weeks the biscuits disappeared and then the leaves seemed to have been disturbed. Hey presto after about six weeks we cautiously lifted the lid and there was a hog - fast asleep. It used the hog hotel fairly regularly over the summer, coming out at dusk and we caught it on camera returning to bed at about 5 a.m. We left it very much to its own devices, but were fascinated to notice how it managed to regulate the temperature of its hotel room by dragging in an extra leaves in the colder weather and making a completely enclosed ball of leaves to sleep in, whilst in the hot spells it slept in the entrance of the hotel having thrown off all the sheets! A pretty good match to human behaviour!! Haven't seen our visitor for a while, hope it's ok, but there might not be a happy ending as we had a recent report of dead hog far from us. Fingers crossed