

The Hedgehog



BTO

Looking out for birds

The British Trust for Ornithology's Garden BirdWatch does not just take records of birds – you can also record mammals, butterflies, amphibians and other species which visit your garden. This of course means I can record hedgehogs, but these days it is apparent that there are not so many about. I know I have had them in my garden recently as I found their deposits and I've noticed this year that my hostas have not been attacked by slugs. Unfortunately it is a sad fact that these days many sightings of hedgehogs are casualties of roadkill. This loveable mammal is in trouble but roadkill is only part of the problem. Over the last ten years it is thought that we have lost approximately a third of our hedgehogs.

Our gardens are very important places for hedgehogs but, unfortunately, many of our gardens are not very hedgehog friendly. They are too tidy and all too often we build a barricade around our properties which stops the movement of this creature. A hedgehog will travel over one to two kilometres a night foraging for food, and walls and fences prevent them entering our gardens to access the slugs and insects which they are fond of. Many gardens are also dangerous places for this mammal. They can drown in ponds, get injured, often fatally, by mowers and strimmers, they can be poisoned by slug pellets, burnt inside bonfire heaps and speared in compost heaps. So what can we do to help them and halt their decline in numbers?

- We can get together with our neighbours and make a gap in a fence or dig a channel underneath so that hedgehogs have access between gardens. All you need to do is cut a 13cm (5 inches) square hole in the base of a fence or wall and this will be sufficient for a hedgehog to pass through.
- If you have a pond, ensure it has a shallow ledge so hedgehogs can climb out or you can use a plank or pile of stones to create a ramp.
- Leave aside a wild area in your garden and don't cut it back in winter. Hedgehogs may find this an attractive site for insects and may even nest there. Don't clear all the leaves in autumn; hedgehogs will collect them for their hibernation nests. Log piles will also attract insects and provide a nest.
- Feed hedgehogs with cat food or mealworms. Leave a dish of water for them and do not give them milk as it makes them ill.
- Discard those slug pellets. Why use them when this natural predator will eat them? Stop using pesticides and insecticides which kill the food source of the hedgehog.
- Before you use your mower or strimmer, check first for hedgehogs.
- Check bonfire piles and ensure there isn't a hibernating hedgehog inside.
- Check your compost heap for hedgehogs before turning it with a fork.

This October, the Royal Horticultural Society, the Wildlife Trusts and Hedgehog Street are having a **Wild about Gardens** week between 26th October to 1st November. The aim is to encourage people to support local biodiversity in their gardens and this year the emphasis is on hedgehogs. They all recommend that you adopt the above. If you help a hedgehog, it will help you – it's a reciprocal arrangement.



Hedgehog by John Harding / BTO

Jean is a voluntary Ambassador for the British Trust for Ornithology's (BTO) Garden BirdWatch scheme in Nottinghamshire. If you are interested in birds and other wildlife which visit your garden then BTO Garden BirdWatch may be perfect for you. If you would like a free information pack about the scheme, please contact Jean at jpbirds@talktalk.net