

# Creating the ultimate... *hedgehog habitat*



Jess Brooks is our farmland biodiversity advisor for southern England and has an in-depth knowledge of farmland wildlife and habitats.

Hedgehogs are a much-loved animal in the UK, but the gloomy findings of the Hedgehog Street partnership's *State of Britain's Hedgehogs 2018* report came as no surprise. Since the report was released in February, many media articles and commentaries have focused on the role of intensive arable farming in the continued national decline of hedgehogs, usually citing widespread hedgerow loss and use of pesticides. It's true that the data suggests that numbers of this popular mammal have plummeted by half in rural areas in the past 20 years. However, reports neglect to point out that in this period, farmers have halted and reversed hedgerow loss, refined pesticide use and created habitat corridors and foraging areas like rough field corners and grass margins through agri-environment schemes or their own good will. Of course, more habitat should be reinstated, and some existing habitat can be improved, but scores of people living and working in the countryside will tell you that there's another big factor influencing the fate of hedgehogs: the badger population.

Badgers don't necessarily target hedgehogs – they're a highly successful generalist forager and compete with hedgehogs for invertebrate prey. But if other food sources are scarce, they won't say no to a hedgehog supper, and indeed they're the main natural predator of hedgehogs.

Badgers have doubled in number in the past 30 years, a fact often ignored by the media in articles about hedgehog declines. Latest research by the University of Oxford (Pettett et al, 2017) shows that badger presence significantly influences hedgehog behaviour and energy expenditure on arable farmland. Tagged hedgehogs foraged and travelled less where badger odour was recorded, and they stayed closer to buildings. Built-up areas afford more enclosure and protection, which is perhaps one of the reasons they remain in gardens of towns and villages. Below are some simple things you can do to help your hedgehogs. For more advice please contact us on 01425 651013.

Plant hedgerows\* – why not replace a fenceline with a bushy shelter of native shrubs and trees. Connect up with hedgehog hotspots such as village boundaries, yards and suburbs.

\*Funding available via Countryside Stewardship Hedges & Boundaries Grant, open January-April 2019.



Lay hedgerows\* – many have grown leggy, or developed into treelines. A thick tangled understory affords shelter from predators.

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If you live in a built-up area, there are easy ways to increase your local population. Provide access to your garden – make CD-sized holes in boundaries.



Make a hedgehog hibernation/nesting home using an upturned grocery box, logs or rubble, stuffing it well with dry leaves.



Feed hedgehogs – wet dog/cat food or cat biscuits are ideal. You can make a pet-excluding feeding station out of a box. Cover ponds with mesh or provide an 'escape' ramp; let a corner of your garden go wild to harbour insect prey and use slug poison as a last resort.



### Top facts about hedgehogs

Hedgehogs are one of only three mammals to hibernate in the United Kingdom.

Baby hedgehogs are called 'hoglets'.

Hedgehogs have very bad eyesight, but their senses of smell and hearing are impeccable.



They have between 5,000-7,000 spines on their back which raise and lower if they feel threatened. Hedgehogs will curl up in a ball when they feel threatened and use these spines to protect themselves.

Hedgehogs enjoy foraging around in bushes and the undergrowth, that's how they got their name. They are known as a 'gardener's friend' as they eat all the insects that nibble our much-loved plants.

Brush/logpiles – after tree-felling or trimming, start a hedgehog refuge in a field corner that they can use while foraging or to hibernate.



Fit cattle grids with a ramp to enable hedgehogs to escape if they fall in.



- ### More information
- Hedgehog Street is running a campaign where people can register to be a Hedgehog Champion in their community and find out more information and download leaflets. Visit [www.hedgehogstreet.org](http://www.hedgehogstreet.org).
  - The People's Trust for Endangered Species are shortly launching guidance for farmers. Visit [www.ptes.org](http://www.ptes.org).