Creating the ultimate... hedgehog habitat

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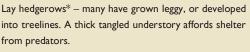
edgehogs are a much-loved animal in the UK, but the gloomy findings of the Hedgehog Street partnership's *State of Britain's Hedgehogs 2018* report came as no surprise. Since the report was released in February, many media articles and commentaries have focused on the role of intensive arable farming 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.

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