



Phoenix Advice

What to do if you find a hedgehog

Useful contacts:-

Your local vet (for a serious injury or obvious distress)

Simone Bryant 05 55 78 20 14 simonekilburn@hotmail.co.uk

Rowena Shrimpton 05 53 52 71 01 squidgey@orange.fr

Charente Nature

Centre de Sauvegarde at Torsac : 05 45 24 81 39 or 05 45 91 89 70 charentenature@charente-nature.org

CSFSP (Centre se Soins de la Faune Sauvage Poitevine)

<http://www.centredesoinsfaunesauvage.com/#!contact>
12 rue Marcel Pagnol , 86100 Targé



Hedgehogs are nocturnal and if one is found in daylight, this is usually indicative that something is wrong.

Nest disturbance is an exception, as is being seen out in the early light mornings and evenings during mid-summer. A nursing female may occasionally be seen out during daylight in search of food and water before returning to her nest to suckle her young, but this is relatively infrequent. Nonetheless, daytime activity outside a few hours preceding dusk and proceeding dawn should be considered abnormal. Additionally, it should be noted that hedgehogs seen out and about at night during the winter are not necessarily a cause for concern. Hedgehogs will periodically rouse from hibernation and some may leave the hibernaculum to search for food or even build a new nest. Such hedgehogs should only be rescued if they appear sickly or in a collapsed state.

Hedgehogs do not come out during the day to lie in the sun – this is most definitely a sign of a very sick hedgehog trying to keep itself warm. Many seen out during daylight are likely to be orphaned, injured, poisoned or cold and starving; your help is essential. Staggering and poor muscle co-ordination may mean an internal injury, but it could also indicate hypothermia. If suffering with hypothermia, the hedgehog will be unable to eat, drink or curl up and so it is crucial that the casualty is kept warm.

If you're unable to take the casualty to your nearest hedgehog carer, wildlife centre or vet immediately (most wildlife centres offer a 24hr rescue service and some vets treat wildlife for free), there are some immediate steps you can take to care for the hedgehog(s) in the interim.

The following information is in no way intended as a substitute for seeking veterinary or other professional help and advice.

Indeed, in many cases, injured hedgehogs will require treatment from a qualified vet as cases of broken limbs, serious cuts, parasite infection, diarrhoea and alopecia (loss of spines/fur) are not uncommon ailments and require specialist treatment. Those that have been hit by cars, or survived an encounter with a lawn mower or strimmer will need urgent hospitalisation

FIRST STEPS

Immediate actions to take:

When you find a hedgehog, it is important to stay calm and move slowly around it. Remember they are wild animals and not used to human contact and the less stressed it feels the easier it will be to help it. Put your hand on both sides and pick it up gently. Place it in a safe place where it can't escape.

Step One: Ensure the hedgehog is kept warm; place it in a HIGH SIDED BOX (hedgehogs are adept at climbing) lined with newspaper. Place the hedgehog on a hot water bottle that has been WRAPPED in a towel and cover the hedgehog with another towel. Ensure there's enough room for the hedgehog to move off the hot water bottle if it gets too hot. Be aware that direct heat is not advisable if internal bleeding is suspected. **N.B.** Electrically heated pads for pets are ideal but not always available. Each case should be assessed individually but, during treatment, the hedgehog should generally be kept at between 19 deg-C and 21 deg-C (66 - 70 deg-F). It must be remembered that it's essential for very sick hogs (pneumonia/lungworm, traffic accidents) to have direct heat, as well as warm ambient temperature. If a hot water bottle is not available (or the box is too small to accommodate one and provide room for the hedgehog to retreat if it gets too hot), a small plastic pop/milk bottle filled with hot water, and wrapped in a tea-towel (which the hedgehog could lean against for warmth) would serve as a good alternative.

Step Two: Check for fly eggs (they look like thick clumps of pollen/tiny white specks) and/or maggots in the ears, mouth, anus, armpits and fur. They must be removed as soon as possible with tweezers, or brushed off with a soft toothbrush. Any in the mouth should be washed out with diluted antiseptic mouthwash, and any in the eyes washed out with warm water.

Step Three: Bathe open wounds with warm salt water (the salt will help flush out bacteria) and seek help as soon as possible. If there is a problem with the eyes, bathe them in warm water or Optrex® (cold tea can also be used - presumably it is the tannins in the tea that have a mild antiseptic effect) and again seek advice.

Step Four: Once the hedgehog has warmed up, offer it a drink of WATER or LECTADE® (Lectade® is a re-hydrating solution which can be obtained from a vet). A good emergency home-made re-hydrating fluid can be made by mixing **1 litre tepid boiled water with 1 tablespoon of sugar and 1 teaspoon of salt**. If the hedgehog is very weak, try administering the fluid with a dropper or syringe. **NEVER give cow's milk** as this can cause severe diarrhoea and enteritis. Store any excess in covered container in fridge and use within a few days, or pour into ice cube trays, freeze and then defrost and gently reheat as and when required.

Step Five: If the hedgehog is not visibly injured and appears to respond to your treatment, then offer a small amount of meat flavoured -- preferably not fish, as this seems generally less appealing to hedgehogs and so it's less likely they will eat it -- cat (or kitten food, if the casualty is a weaned hoglet) or dog food, or a little cooked chicken (without bones). Continue with the Lectade® drink as this will replace vital salts and minerals. For a very small hoglet generally under 100g in weight, it will need to be toileted (see below) and given a milk formula every four hours, preferably formula for puppy's but in a short term emergency **goat's milk** from the supermarket will be ok. This will need to be warm and given slowly in a syringe. 100 – 120g in weight and some kitten food can be liquidised with the milk and given every four hours during the day, and a shallow bowl left at night.



Step Six: Keep the box in a warm, dark, quiet place to aid recovery and reduce stress. Cover it with a net curtain, or something similar, to protect from flies, dirt, etc.

N.B. Gloves should be worn when handling hedgehogs. This is for your protection as much as theirs. Hedgehogs have sharp spines and, in exceptionally rare cases -- e.g. when they are in severe pain or very frightened -- they may bite.

Toileting: Young hoglets that have not been fully weaned need help to wee and poo. In the wild their mother would lick them to stimulate this. This can be done by simply holding it uncurled on its back and with a cotton bud slowly and gently stroke the cotton bud from its chest, gently around the penis (if it's a boy) and down to the anus. Keep repeating this until you get a result. It is necessary to do this when found and then after each feed.

The Perils of Self-Diagnosis

Wherever possible, a professional diagnosis should be sought. The reason for this is pretty straight forward: some symptoms can have more than one possible cause, thereby potentially complicating treatment. The table below has been compiled to explain what we mean. As you can see, hyperactivity, for example, can be a sign of a heavy worm infestation, an infection, dehydration or stress - each potential cause has a different, specific treatment. So, if a hyperactive hedgehog were diagnosed with dehydration when it actually had a lungworm infection, rehydrating fluids wouldn't solve the problem and may waste valuable time. Remember too that these are likely causes and not an exhaustive list of possible causes. A coughing hedgehog, for example, is likely to be suffering from either a lungworm infection (active or residual) or pneumonia. Coughing can, however, also stem from nest fouling -- if a hedgehog defecates in its nest, the faeces can often cause the hedgehog to cough --, dust on bedding hay/straw, or from being in an environment that's too dry. The moral here is simple: **if you think that the hedgehog needs medical treatment, take it to a qualified animal welfare centre or veterinary surgeon.**



SYMPTOM	LIKELY CAUSE(S)
Tiny white/yellow flecks or pollen-like clumps	Fly eggs
Tiny jumping insects	Host-specific hedgehog fleas
White/grey shiny nodules	Ticks
Fur/Spine loss	Mites and/or ringworm (fungal infection)
Coughing	Lungworm (coughing helps expel dead worms) or pneumonia.
Green poo (jelly-like consistency or mucousy)	Worms, enteritis
Brown diarrhoea	Incorrect diet e.g. cow's milk, gravy-based cat/dog food
Wobbling	Dehydrated, hypothermia - typically secondary to underlying infection
Lying out in sun	Dehydrated, hypothermia - typically secondary to underlying infection
Wandering about in daylight	Poorly, starving/dehydrated, nest disturbance, lactating female
Hyperactivity	Heavy worm infestation, infection, dehydration, stress
Distressed, crying (peeping), squealing	Injured, very ill, or unweaned hoglet searching for mother

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