

HELP OUR HEDGEHOGS – a talk by Terry Green retired Animal Care lecturer from Pershore College. September 2022

The hedgehog is one of Britain's best loved mammals, but it is in serious decline. And our tidy, well tended gardens may be part of the reason for that! Most of us are pleased to see, or more often, hear, a hedgehog snuffling around our garden without realising that we have encouraged the friendly creature into an environment full of danger. Terry Green, from Britain's Hedgehog Preservation Society, told members of the Malvern group of the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust that a few precautions can help us bring hedgehogs back. Many gardeners are aware of the potential danger of slug pellets being ingested by hedgehogs when they eat their favourite juicy slugs and snails. But what about your garden pond or pool? Hedgehogs can swim, but if they can't climb out, they quickly become exhausted and drown. Make sure that there is at least one sloping side or a piece of wood or a stone close to the edge to help them escape. Do check areas of long grass before mowing or strimming. We may have finished that job in the garden for now, but the season of bonfires is upon us! There is nothing a hibernating hedgehog likes more than to curl up in the middle of your pile of branches, twigs or leaves. Just before a bonfire is lit, the base should be lifted with poles or broom handles (not a fork!) and a torch shone in to look for any hedgehogs in need of rescue. Light from one side only to allow an escape route for anything you may have missed. Just a few precautions can make our gardens safe, and then a little meaty dog or cat food or biscuits will attract any hedgehogs in the neighbourhood and a small straw filled box will offer a perfect hibernation den. We can all play a part in helping our hedgehog numbers to recover. Many big businesses have helped: MacDonalds re-designed their "slurry" cups when they found that hedgehogs became trapped in them when searching through food litter, and Taylor Woodrow, when building houses with gardens, create small ground level openings in fences to allow hedgehogs to pass safely through. There is hope for our hedgehogs! The WWF Malvern Group's next meeting is at 7.30 pm on Thursday 3rd November at The Lyttelton Rooms, Church Street, Malvern WR14 2AY. "*The Ecology of Herefordshire's Ice Age Ponds*" will be the subject. Entrance £2.50, all welcome.

Avoid using pesticides and slug pellets in your garden. Not only can these harm hedgehogs but also damage their food chain. Use organic methods instead.

Make sure hedgehogs have easy access to your garden. Ensure boundary fences or walls have a 13cm x 13cm gap in the bottom to allow hedgehogs to pass through.

Keep a corner of your garden wild to offer shelter, protection and natural food for hedgehogs and other wildlife. Encourage hedgehogs into your garden, but you should never just move one

in from another area, as it may well have a nest of dependent young that you would be condemning to death.

Provide a shallow dish of fresh water for all wildlife, and food such as meaty hedgehog food, meaty cat or dog food or cat biscuits for hedgehogs, especially during long dry spells.

Make or buy a hedgehog home, this offers a hibernation site that is safer from predators in the winter. It may also be used as a nesting box for a mother and her hoglets in the warmer months.

The British Hedgehog Preservation Society can provide a leaflet on building a hedgehog home and sells one in its shop (see www.britishhedgehogs.org.uk or contact details over).

Check areas thoroughly for hedgehogs and other wildlife before strimming or mowing. Keep pea netting 22-30cms (9 - 12 inches) off the ground so that hedgehogs can pass safely under and plants will grow to the netting.

Dispose of litter responsibly. Every year hedgehogs are injured by litter and starve to death by getting trapped in discarded rubbish.

Bonfires offer a tempting home for a hedgehog. Ideally, collected materials should be re-sited just before the fire is to be lit, if this is not possible, the base should be lifted up with poles or broom handles (not a fork!) and a torch shone in to look (and listen) for any wildlife or pets in need of rescue before lighting. Once checked, light from one side only to allow an escape route for anything you may have missed.

Hedgehogs are good swimmers but can become trapped in ponds or pools with sheer sides.

Keep water levels topped up, provide a gently sloping edge if possible or place half submerged rocks in the water as an escape for them.

Take care on the roads, hedgehogs are nocturnal so are out at night.