

What's in your garden?

Since the July edition there has been much in the press about bees and the continuing population decline. I've certainly noticed a number in our garden particularly around the lavender mixing with the cabbage white butterflies; perhaps you've spotted some too. As Autumn approaches I hoped that a feature about hedgehogs might attract your attention. Love them or loathe them hedgehogs are more common than you might think.

Hedgehogs or graineogs or furzepigs, as they are sometimes called, are nocturnal mammals covered in a coat of sharp spines. Urchins or hoglets (baby hedgehogs), will develop very quickly with their spines growing at birth. They will travel up to 2-3 km a night when looking for food, beetles, earthworms, caterpillars and insects, and will probably live for up to 5 years.



There are many **myths and legends** surrounding hedgehogs, some going back to Egyptian times when the hedgehog was believed to symbolise reincarnation. Folklore suggested that hedgehogs could predict a change in the wind and could even be a cure, if eaten, for boils, blindness and leprosy. More modern misconceptions about hedgehogs are:

Hedgehogs are vermin – No, although actually a wild animal they are more closely related to moles and shrews.

Hedgehogs have fleas – Yes they do, but not ones that can live on humans, your pet dog or cat or in your home. They can be a bit smelly though so don't think about trying to capture one as a pet!

Hedgehogs like milk – No, please don't leave a saucer of milk out for any hedgehogs, try some moist, meaty cat or dog food instead but do replace it on a daily basis.

Hedgehogs hibernate in Winter – These creatures might hibernate in their nests in the coldest months between January and March but this is not always the case. They prefer a dense area of grassland or hedgerow where they will be protected from predators.

How can I get the children involved?

<http://www.britishhedgehogs.org.uk/kids.htm> - for hedgehog pictures to print off and colour in plus take a look at the 'hogalogue' full of interesting ideas for the garden

http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/science/livingworld_20020616.shtml - to listen again to BBC Radio 4 'Living World' about hedgehogs – listen to the experts tracking hedgehogs at night!

<http://www.sttiggywinkles.org.uk/kids.html> - for puzzles, activities and colouring