

HEDGEHOG

Erinaceus europaeus

Rarely seen at the Marina



Distinctive mammal that is unique among British species on account of its body coating of protective spines.

DESCRIPTION – Hedgehogs have a coating of several thousand spines (which are modified hairs) on the back. These are sleeked back when foraging but erectile when the animal rolls into a defensive ball. The ears are short and the muzzle-shaped head ends with a sensitive nose. The head and underparts are covered in coarse hairs.

VOICE – Hedgehogs utter a piercing pig-like squeal when distressed. Various grunts and snorts are heard when feeding or courting.

HABITAT – It favours areas with a mosaic of grassy and scrub habitats. Meadows with neighbouring hedgerows and woodland are good for the species but by far the highest density occurs in parks and gardens.

FOOD – Hedgehogs aren't fussy when it comes to food: worms, slugs, frogs and even bird eggs can be taken during a two kilometre nightly forage, a resistance to adder venom can also put this snake on the menu. .

BREEDING – Hedgehogs are ready to breed in April, soon after hibernation ends. 3-5 hoglets are born early in the summer, though sometimes there is later litter in September. Late born young often do not survive the winter. Young hedgehogs are born with soft spines under the skin to protect mum, with a second set of spines emerging within days.

If a mother is disturbed in her nest she may eat any new born young but will carry older ones away by the scruff of the neck.

PREDATORS – Badgers are the main predator, occasionally domestic dogs and foxes.

OTHER FACTS – One peculiarity to all hedgehogs is the way they cover their spines in foamy saliva, the reason why they do this remains a mystery although it has been suggested it might be a sexual attractant, or be used to reduce parasites, or as additional protection.

Hedgehogs are very good swimmers when the need arises and also good climbers.

