

Wildlife Welfare

What to Do If You Find an Injured Wild Animal

It can be tricky to figure out when a wild animal really needs our help or when it's better to let them be. Wild animals often see humans as predators, so they tend to hide any injuries or illness when we're around. Watching from a distance can give you a better idea of how serious the situation is and whether they might need treatment or if they're better off recovering on their own. Many times, by the point they let us get close enough to rescue them, they're actually in worse shape than they seem.

Wild animals need expert care to have the best shot at survival, and we can all help make sure they get the right care as quickly as possible. If it's safe, transporting the animal yourself can be the fastest way to get them the help they urgently need.



Safety Guidance for Helping Animals

We really appreciate your compassion for animals and your desire to lend a helping hand. It's wonderful to see that kind of care in action! However, it's essential to approach these situations safely—for both you and the animal in need. Here's some helpful guidance to keep in mind:

Assess the Situation

Before jumping in to help, take a moment to evaluate the surroundings. Never put yourself in harm's way when trying to assist an animal, especially if it's in a risky location such as:

- On a clifftop
- In water

- On ice
- At a height
- Down a deep drain
- In a confined space
- On a road or rail track

Personal Protection

If you do need to handle an animal, prepare yourself first. Injured or frightened animals can be unpredictable, so protect yourself from potential scratches or bites by wearing:

- Thick gloves (gardening gloves work well)
- Long sleeves and long trousers
- Goggles or glasses



- A face covering

Handling Wild Animals, Including Birds

- **Keep Contact Minimal:** Try to maintain distance and avoid getting too close.
- **Avoid Leaning In:** Don't lean over or put your face close to them.

- **Use a Blanket or Towel:** Gently drape a blanket or towel over the animal to calm them and protect yourself.
- **Ask for Help:** If you need an extra pair of hands or moral support, don't hesitate to ask someone.
- **Secure Transport:** Place the animal calmly into a secure box with air holes. Keep it outside—don't bring it indoors.
- **Ventilate While Transporting:** When transporting, keep the animal as far from you as possible and open the windows for fresh air.
- **Call Ahead:** If you're taking a wild animal to the GSPCA, call in advance for any additional instructions.

Clean-Up After Handling

After your encounter, make sure to wash any clothing, blankets, or towels used in a hot wash. Dispose of anything that's disposable right away and disinfect all surfaces you came into contact with, like your glasses and the inside of your vehicle.

Animals You Should Not Handle

Some animals require specialised knowledge to handle safely. We advise against handling the following unless they are already safely contained and helping them poses no risk to you:

- Wild animals and birds the size of a gull or larger
- Birds like owls, swans, geese, or herons
- Large seabirds such as gannets and cormorants
- Exotic pets like snakes, spiders, geckos, or African land snails
- Bats
- Certain farm animals kept as pets, like goats, ducks, and sheep
- Feral cats
- Ferrets

If you encounter any of these animals and suspect they need help, keep your distance and contact the GSPCA for assistance.

Avoid Confrontation

If helping an animal leads to a confrontation with an owner or someone nearby, it's best to step back. In cases of cruelty or neglect, don't hesitate to call the police or reach out to us for help.

We want you to stay safe, so please remember that we can't accept liability for any harm, damage, or loss that may occur while helping an animal. Thank you for your kindness and dedication to animal welfare!

Sick or Injured Birds



With bird flu still impacting many birds across the UK, it's crucial to take precautions to protect yourself since it can also affect humans. If you come across a sick bird, avoid touching it right away and make sure to read our bird flu advice before taking any further action.

Telling if a wild bird is sick or injured can be tricky because birds tend to hide signs of pain when people are nearby. But don't worry—there are some key things you can look out for, and if you're unsure, you can always reach out to an expert for advice.

If you come across a bird that doesn't seem quite right, a good first step is to snap a few pictures or videos. Then, contact the GSPCA who can guide you on what to do next.

Signs That a Bird May Need Help:

1. **Visible wounds or bleeding:** If you can see any obvious injuries, it's definitely time to take action.
2. **The bird was caught by a cat or dog:** Even if there's no visible injury, there's still a high chance of infection, so it's important to get them checked out.
3. **The bird doesn't move when you approach:** Healthy birds, even when resting on the ground, should try to fly or walk away if someone gets too close.
4. **Fluffed-up feathers:** Birds will puff up their feathers to stay warm in cold weather, but if they're doing this when it's not particularly cold, it could be a sign they're unwell.
5. **Struggling to hold their head up or maintain balance:** If a bird looks unsteady or if their head or neck seems twisted, that's a red flag.
6. **Swelling or crusty growths on their skin:** These are usually found on their face, legs, or feet and may indicate an illness or infection.
7. **Panting or breathing fast:** While birds do pant when they're too hot, if you notice a bird doing this for more than two hours, it could signal something more serious.

By keeping an eye out for these signs, you can help determine whether a bird is in trouble and needs assistance.

If a bird flies into your window and appears stunned, it's important to act calmly. First, observe the bird quietly for about two hours. If possible, gently place the bird in a well-ventilated box to keep it safe while it recovers. If after this time the bird seems better, open the box and see if it flies away on its own. However, if the bird is still unable to fly after the two-hour window, it's best to contact the GSPCA for further advice.

How to Prevent Birds from Flying Into Windows

Birds often collide with windows because they're confused by reflections of trees or the sky, thinking they can fly straight through. To help prevent this, you can reduce the window's reflection by placing something visible on the glass, like a stick-on silhouette of a bird of prey, which acts as a deterrent. These simple solutions can help keep birds safe from these accidental collisions.



Hedgehogs

Hedgehogs are naturally nocturnal, so spotting one during the day can often signal that something's wrong. They're most active at night when they hunt for food, like insects and worms, which are more abundant after dark. Occasionally, a hedgehog might be out during the day if their nest was disturbed or they're having difficulty finding food, especially in dry conditions.

However, if you see a hedgehog moving about in full daylight, it could be a sign of illness or injury. In these cases, it's important to keep an eye on the hedgehog and seek advice from the GSPCA or Hedgehog Rescue Centre to ensure it gets the help it needs.

To figure out if a hedgehog needs help, here's what to look for:

If the hedgehog seems healthy, is active, and the weather is mild, it's probably fine. Offer some food and water, then monitor from a distance. However, if any of the following signs are present, the hedgehog may be sick or injured:

- Visible injuries, like cuts or a broken leg.
- It shows no interest in food.
- It's staggering, wobbly, walking in circles, or appears lethargic.
- There are many flies or ticks on the hedgehog.
- You notice maggots or fly eggs on its body.
- It doesn't roll up or try to roll up when approached or touched.



Additionally, hedgehogs need help if:

- The weather is cold (frost, snow, or temperatures below freezing).
- It weighs less than 300g (about the size of an apple).
- It's in immediate danger, such as being on a road.

In these situations, it's best to contact the GSPCA or Hedgehog Rescue Centre for assistance.

If you come across a sick or injured hedgehog, here's what to do:

1. **Safely catch and handle the hedgehog:** Wear thick gloves or use a folded towel to gently pick up the hedgehog. You can also gently throw a towel over it, which might make it curl up, making handling easier.
2. **Place in a secure box:** Use a high-sided cardboard box lined with a towel to keep the hedgehog safe and comfortable.
3. **Get it to a rescue centre:** Take the hedgehog to the GSPCA or Hedgehog Rescue Centre as soon as possible. If that's not immediately possible, keep the hedgehog warm and quiet indoors, offering a small amount of food and water.

Sadly, by the time wild animals can be caught, they are often in poor condition, and the rescue centre may decide that the kindest thing to do is to put the animal to sleep. Be prepared for this difficult possibility.

Key points to remember:

- **Always wear gloves:** Hedgehogs can carry diseases like ringworm and salmonella, which can be transmitted to humans.
- **Minimise handling:** Hedgehogs get stressed from human contact, so handle them as little as possible.
- **Multiple hedgehogs:** Hedgehogs from the same litter can be kept together in the same box, as long as there is enough space.



Hedgehogs in the Garden

Hedgehogs are fantastic allies for gardeners because they munch on pesky pests like beetles, caterpillars, worms, and other invertebrates. Interestingly, your garden might host up to **10 different hedgehogs** over several nights! So, when you think you're seeing the same hedgehog repeatedly, it could actually be a parade of different visitors at various times.

Here's how you can encourage these charming creatures to visit your garden and ensure they feel right at home all year round:

1. **Create a Hedgehog-Friendly Habitat:** Leave some areas of your garden a bit wild with piles of leaves, twigs, and brush. This gives hedgehogs cozy spots to nest and hide.
2. **Provide Food and Water:** Consider putting out some hedgehog-specific food, like meat-based cat or dog food, and fresh water to keep them nourished and hydrated.
3. **Ensure Safe Passage:** Check your garden for any barriers that might block hedgehogs from entering or leaving, such as fences or walls. You can make small holes or gaps (around 13 cm in diameter) to allow them easy access.
4. **Avoid Chemicals:** Refrain from using pesticides and herbicides, as these can harm hedgehogs and their food sources. Go for organic gardening methods whenever possible.

5. **Provide Shelters:** You can build or buy hedgehog houses to give them a safe space to rest or hibernate during colder months.

By taking these simple steps, you can create a welcoming environment for hedgehogs and enjoy their delightful presence in your garden!

Feeding Hedgehogs



If you want to invite hedgehogs into your garden, providing food and fresh water is a great way to start! Here are some helpful tips for keeping your spiky visitors happy and well-fed:

Food and Water Tips:

- **Ideal Foods:** Offer tinned dog or cat food and crushed cat or dog biscuits. These are tasty and nutritious options!
- **Specialty Hedgehog Food:** Look for high-quality, meaty hedgehog food from wildlife suppliers to give them a balanced diet.
- **Avoid Milk and Bread:** Never feed hedgehogs milk or bread, as milk can upset their tummies, leading to diarrhoea, and bread isn't nutritious for them.
- **Daily Check-ins:** Make it a habit to check the food and water bowls every day. Refresh their water and food, and remove any uneaten food to keep things clean.
- **Clean Dishes:** Wash the dishes daily using hot, soapy water (outside, not in the kitchen) and rinse them well. This helps prevent the spread of disease among visiting hedgehogs.

Hedgehog-Friendly Gardening Tips

Creating a hedgehog-friendly garden goes beyond just providing food. Here are some easy steps you can take to make your garden a safe haven for these delightful creatures:

- **Cover Holes:** Hedgehogs can easily fall into open drains or holes. Cover them or check daily to make sure no hedgehogs are trapped inside.
- **Pond Safety:** Provide an escape route from ponds or pools by placing bricks or stones at the edges. A sloped edge can help hedgehogs climb out if they fall in. Also, cover swimming pools when they're not in use.
- **Be Cautious with Tools:** Always check for hedgehogs before using strimmers or mowers, especially under hedges where they might be napping. If you're turning over a compost heap, do a quick check for any nesting hedgehogs first.
- **Bonfire Safety:** Disturb bonfires thoroughly before lighting them. Hedgehogs might be nesting inside, so it's best to move the whole structure by hand to ensure they're safe.
- **Watch Out for Litter:** Litter is a significant hazard for hedgehogs. They can get their heads stuck in cans, plastic bags, or yogurt pots. Always dispose of your rubbish properly and keep your garden litter-free. Remember to cut up any plastic rings!
- **Raise Netting:** If you have netting or wire in your garden, make sure it's at least a foot off the ground to prevent hedgehogs from getting tangled. Store any fruit nets, tennis nets, or goal nets when they're not in use, and consider replacing them with solid metal mesh.
- **Shed Safety:** Don't close your shed doors if you typically leave them open; a hedgehog might be nesting inside! Keep hazardous chemicals and tools stored high off the ground, and check for hedgehogs before dismantling your shed.
- **Natural Pest Control:** Avoid slug pellets and pesticides, which can be harmful to hedgehogs. Try natural alternatives like crushed eggshells or coffee grounds to protect your plants. If you must use pellets, place them under a slate that hedgehogs can't access. Note that using slug pellets containing metaldehyde outdoors has been banned in Great Britain since March 2022.

By following these tips, you'll create a welcoming environment for hedgehogs and help ensure their well-being!

What to Do If You Disturb a Hedgehog

If you happen to disturb a hedgehog, here's how to handle the situation with care:

For Hibernating Hedgehogs:

1. **Gently Return Them:** If you find a hedgehog that's hibernating, gently pick it up and place it back in its nest. Be sure to re-cover it with the nesting material to keep it cozy and safe.
2. **When Nesting Sites Are Destroyed:** If the original nesting site is no longer available (perhaps it's been disturbed or destroyed), find a quiet, sheltered spot in your garden to place the hedgehog. Try to use as much of the original nest material as you can to make it feel more at home.
3. **Alternative Shelter:** If your garden doesn't have enough natural shelter, you can use a large box to create a safe haven. Just make sure the hedgehog can easily find its way out when it wakes up.



For Hedgehogs with Young Hoglets:

- **Leave Them Be:** If the hedgehog isn't hibernating and has little hoglets (baby hedgehogs), simply re-cover the hoglets with the nesting material and give them space. It's best to let the mother do her thing without interference.

By following these steps, you can help ensure that hedgehogs feel safe and secure, allowing them to continue their natural behaviours without added stress.

Cats, Dogs, and Hedgehogs: What You Need to Know

When it comes to your furry friends and hedgehogs, here's the scoop:

Cats:

- **Usually No Issue:** Most cats aren't a problem for hedgehogs. After a quick sniff around, they tend to lose interest and leave them alone.



Dogs:

- **Potential Threat:** Dogs can pose a risk to hedgehogs, so it's a good idea to keep them away from these little creatures. When the sun sets and hedgehogs start to roam, keep your dog on a lead or monitor them closely while in the garden.
- **Light as a Warning:** Before heading outside, you can give any hedgehogs a heads-up by turning on a light. This can help them make a quick exit!



Hedgehog Fleas:

- **Not a Concern for Pets:** While hedgehogs can carry fleas, pet owners shouldn't worry. The fleas found on hedgehogs can only survive on them, meaning they won't jump to your cats or dogs.

By being mindful of these interactions, you can help create a safer environment for hedgehogs in your garden while ensuring your pets stay safe too!