**HELPING WANSTEAD’S HEDGEHOGS**

Hedgehogs are a beloved part of our British countryside, but like so many other aspects of our wildlife, they are under massive pressure to survive in our modern world.

In the 1950s, there were around 30 million hedgehogs in the United Kingdom. Now there are less than one million. A variety of factors have led to this cataclysmic decline and unfortunately, humans have had a massive part to play in their demise.

The huge growth in cars on the road, pesticides used in fields and gardens, together with the loss of habitat are the main drivers of this 97% fall in their numbers.

So, what can we do to help?

1. First, we need to help them travel the mile a night they require to gather enough food to eat. Modern gardens have shut off their borders to all wildlife. If you make a CD-sized hole in your fences, or dig a little gap under gravel boards, it will create a hedgehog highway to allow them to pass through.
2. Do not use any pesticides or poison in your gardens! Slug pellets kill slugs and snails for sure, but they also kill the things that are their natural predators, like hedgehogs and song thrushes. This causes them to have a slow and horribly painful death.
3. Create a wild corner for hedgehogs to nest and hide. A recent British obsession is to have neat and tidy gardens. This is fatal for our natural wildlife! A messy log pile in a quiet corner of your garden will provide food in the form of beetles and other tasty insects, along with much needed safe shelter.
4. Hedgehogs also like to make their nests in long grass, so ALWAYS CHECK THOROUGHLY for hedgehogs before strimming or mowing. Hedgehogs are arriving at wildlife rescue centres with horrific and often fatal injuries.
5. Hedgehogs can get tangled in wire or netting left carelessly in corners of the garden. Please always check that you have disposed of potentially dangerous items for wildlife.
6. Hedgehogs struggle to find low-lying water, especially in dry conditions. Please leave shallow bowls of water for them to drink from (with a few stones in, so that pollinators can safely land there too).
7. With fences shut off, hedgehogs also struggle to find food. Leaving out dry meaty cat food, like Go Cat, will help them survive in lean times.
8. A pond attracts a fantastic array of insects, which is great for wildlife. Always check that you have large stones or a sloping side, so that thirsty hedgehogs can climb out if they fall in. Always make ponds safe for children too.
9. There are hedgehogs in Wanstead, but do you know if there are hedgehogs about in your area? Hedgehogs are nocturnal and shy, so you may be unaware that they visit your garden. They leave little black droppings as their only evidence and these are different to foxes as they are solid.
10. The loss of hedgerows and use of pesticides in the countryside have meant that in some areas, hedgehogs have been wiped out completely. Our gardens can provide a much-needed safe haven for these gorgeous, beleaguered creatures.
11. Finally, please move bonfires at the last minute before lighting. Hedgehogs like to sleep under log piles and are killed when fires are lit, as they curl up in a ball when they sense danger, rather than running away.

Good luck in attracting these amazing little mammals to your garden! 🦔