



## **Solihull Hedgehog Improvement Area – 2016 Update February – September 2016**

**Simon Thompson – Senior Hedgehog Officer**

This update aims to outline the work undertaken by Warwickshire Wildlife Trust as part of the Solihull Hedgehog Improvement Area (HIA) project in the spring and summer of 2016. This document will be followed up by a comprehensive report of all of the project's output in February 2017. The continuation of the HIA initiative was made possible thanks to generous funding provided by the British Hedgehog Preservation Society (BHPS).

### **2016 Project Outline**

After a busy pilot year raising the profile of the Hedgehog Improvement Area Project in Solihull, it was decided that the focus of the continued project should see a decrease in the levels of community engagement at the borough wide level and a focus upon certain conservation priorities. With research projects being undertaken elsewhere in the country into novel methods of calculating hedgehog abundance it was felt that the focus of the HIA should remain on grassroots conservation action and increasing our understanding of the way in which our hedgehogs are able to use the urban landscape. This work is on-going and will continue into the autumn and winter of 2016.

### **Hedgehog Presence in Solihull – Survey and Improvements**

Hedgehog presence in Solihull's large network of parks and Local Nature Reserves has been investigated using footprint tunnel surveys undertaken in 17 areas of green space managed by Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC), including three in our focal area of Elmdon. Of the sites surveyed using the footprint tunnel methodology, only 3 returned any positive records of hedgehogs (17.65%).

The management of these areas, informed by the HIA project, is sympathetic towards hedgehogs with broad uncut margins and wild areas present in the vast majority of the borough's parks. SMBC are also looking to improve nesting opportunities for hedgehogs; with the help of a corporate group of volunteers a 200m hedge was planted at Langley Hall Park in West Solihull (Figure 1, Figure 2). Langley Hall Park is a key habitat corridor in the west of the borough, linking between private residences, a Local Nature Reserve, a golf course, a cemetery and a large school playing field. Across this network of green space nesting habitat is limited and it is hoped that the hedgerow, planted with 1,000 whips of native woody

species, will establish into a sizeable tract of potential overwintering habitat for hedgehogs.



**Figure 1.** Senior Hedgehog Officer, Simon Thompson with volunteers and SMBC ecology team at a hedge planting event at SMBC's Langley Hall Park.



**Figure 2.** A group of volunteers planting 200m of native hedgerow at Langley Hall Park.

Work will continue around this site throughout the autumn to bolster immediately local support for hedgehogs and open up corridors throughout the local network of gardens. It is also likely to form part of the project's trial into resident led mapping of urban garden and greenspace connectivity.

As in 2015, a considerable level of disturbance to footprint tunnels in public green space was observed. The majority of this disturbance appeared to be by dogs, with Solihull's parks being heavily used by dog walkers around the clock and in all seasons. This disturbance potentially impacts upon the validity of results, with dogs flattening and/or removing baste from the tunnels during daylight hours preventing hedgehogs from entering and/or removing the incentive for them to do so. It was decided to undertake a series of torchlight searches alongside footprint tunnel surveying in order to corroborate some of these negative results. After a protracted period of discussion with Natural England it was agreed that the project was able to



**Figure 3.** Senior Hedgehog Officer, Simon Thompson undertaking a hedgehog torchlight survey at Hillfield Park, Solihull.

use artificial light to search for hedgehogs at will across both project areas without any licensing requirement.

Predetermined transects were walked across the survey sites after dark with teams of between 2 and 4 volunteers being recruited and trained to aid staff in surveying. Each site was visited for 3 nights. Million candlepower lamps were used to illuminate areas of marginal or open

habitat where required (Figure 3) and all observations were noted and linked back to transect maps. To date 3 sites in Solihull and 3 in Rugby have been surveyed using this method, yielding no sightings of hedgehogs at any site. A fourth site in each borough will be surveyed in September before the onset of the winter period. Initial results appear to validate the negative results of footprint tunnels, leading to an interesting question as to the usefulness of large open green space for hedgehogs within the urban environment and highlighting the importance of connected gardens.

## Connectivity

The maintenance and promotion of increased habitat connectivity is a core objective of the HIA initiative. This is achieved at a variety of scales, principally at a local scale by working with residents to open up garden corridors along the “Hedgehog Street” model. This work continues in Solihull and is being bolstered with the targeted administering of a back garden connectivity survey (Figure 4). This survey aims to both to determine the presence and scale of blockages in the landscape and to begin to map those connections across the urban landscape. These surveys are being delivered to residents who are asked to map their back garden, with information collected about boundary types and presence of connections relative to other gardens.

The figure displays the design of a back garden survey form. The left side is a flyer with the title "Do you have a hedgehog friendly garden?" and a photo of a hedgehog. It includes text about hedgehog numbers in the UK and a request for residents to map their gardens. The right side is a grid-based map for drawing the garden layout, with labels for "Your Street" and "Your House". Below the grid is a section for "Extra information or comments about your property" and a "FOR OFFICE USE ONLY" section.

**Figure 4.** Design of the back garden survey being trialled in the Solihull HIA to collect back garden connectivity data from residents.

The potential for the HIA initiative to feed into the Neighbourhood Planning process was highlighted by Dr Pat Morris as a potential mechanism to promote habitat connectivity at a landscape scale. The borough now has five designated Neighbourhood Areas, with a sixth seeking designation at present. The first of these designated Neighbourhood Areas, Hampton-in-Arden, submitted their draft plan in February of 2016. There was the inclusion of the need for the “protection of green infrastructure and wildlife corridors” within this plan. All other Neighbourhood areas are still in their development and the HIA is in contact with their relevant planning committees to provide input and advice relating to the inclusion of green and wildlife

corridors. It is hoped that with this input, backed up by the support and resources of Warwickshire Wildlife Trust's planning team that enhanced wildlife corridors will be included in all of the borough's Neighbourhood Plans.

### **Community Engagement and Promotion**

Engagement activity has continued in the borough throughout the spring and summer with sixteen talks given to adult groups, 5 talks given to young person's groups, five school visits and seven community events attended. A hedgehog workshop was also delivered to a group from Solihull College. These events continue to be a fantastic way to engage people in hedgehog conservation and actively encourage participation in our survey work, submission of data and promoting habitat improvement work.

The project has again featured prominently in local, national and international news, with the plight of the hedgehog having another unprecedented year of coverage in the media. The Solihull HIA has featured on BBC Coventry and Warwickshire, BBC Radio 4, The Times and The Wall Street Journal with a further article in The Telegraph to feature in the coming autumn.

# **Rugby Hedgehog Improvement Area**

## **Mid Term Report: April – September 2016**

**Dr Deborah Wright, Hedgehog Officer**

The aim of this short report is to give a broad update on the progress made during the first 6 months of the Rugby HIA project.

### **Overall**

The launch of the project was a great success, with an opening event held during Hedgehog Awareness Week engaging over a hundred people.



*Figure 1. Launch event during Hedgehog Awareness Week. Copyright WWT 2016.*

The launch was covered by two local newspapers and local BBC radio, and the press and social media interest has continued throughout the project. This has been bolstered by a constant online presence on Facebook, Twitter and the dedicated project website. There has been national press coverage of both the Warwickshire HIA projects from BBC Radio 4 and international coverage from the Wall Street Journal.

750 hedgehog sightings in Rugby have now been reported, and new leaflets informing residents how to submit sightings and resources about hedgehog conservation have been produced.



New conservation area in Rugby will help save hedgehogs



## Coventry's new hedgehog officer determined to halt decline of nocturnal mammals

Figure 2. Local press coverage of the launch of the project.

The project has been supported throughout by a strong relationship with Rugby Borough Council:

"We are pleased with how the residents of Rugby have taken to the Hedgehog project which is demonstrated by the number of hedgehog sightings that have been recorded. We are now working with Warwickshire Wildlife Trust to identify how best to use this information to change some of our own land management techniques to encourage them further."

*Chris Worman MBE, Parks & Grounds Manager, Rugby Borough Council*

## Community Engagement

**Schools:** Five schools have been visited to date with a total of 635 children engaged. In conjunction with Rugby Borough Council, schools throughout the borough have been given hedgehog houses. Project work with schools has included a range of activities from assemblies, to positioning hedgehog houses, to surveying with footprint tunnels and remote cameras in school grounds.



Figure 3. Remote camera footage from school grounds. Copyright WWT 2016.

**Community events:** The project has been promoted and the public engaged in hedgehog conservation at a variety of events, from Bioblitzs, to village festivals, to community coffee mornings, to garden centre drop-ins.



*Figures 4 (left) and 5 (above). Community events raising awareness of the project and hedgehog conservation. Copyright WWT 2016.*

## Surveying

**Footprint tunnels:** Tunnels and/or remote wildlife cameras have been used by 3 schools, 1 park, 3 nature reserves and 14 Rugby residents. The nature reserves were surveyed with volunteers, who were given training in using footprint tunnels. Two public training events have also been held in how to survey using footprint tunnels and in footprint recognition.



*Figures 5 (left) and 6 (right). Training volunteers in footprint tunnel surveying (left) and positive hedgehog prints (right). Copyright WWT 2016.*

**Torchlight surveys:** Two focal areas of public green space have been surveyed by torchlight for three consecutive evenings each, to determine hedgehog presence or absence. Volunteers were recruited and trained in surveying techniques.



*Figure 7. Conducting torchlight surveys. Copyright WWT 2016.*

**Garden surveys:** A front garden survey is underway in a focal area of Rugby, to determine green space and habitat availability at a local level. A method to survey back gardens is also under development, to determine boundaries and habitat availability of valuable suburban space.

**Social survey:** A comprehensive online and paper-based social survey has been constructed and distributed both face-to-face at events and through social media. The survey asks about people's interactions with, and attitudes and behavioural intentions towards, hedgehogs. The survey will be ongoing throughout the project.

## **Habitat improvement**

A statement regarding the encouragement of permeable barriers and connectivity of residential and non-designated green space has now been accepted for inclusion in the supporting text of the Rugby Local Plan.

Discussions are also underway to alter management plans for multiple Rugby Borough Council sites, with the intention to increase both nesting habitat and connectivity.

Meetings with ecologists for large development sites are in progress to encourage hedgehog-friendly development from the start of the process as opposed to relying on retro-fitting solutions.