

# Hedgehog Decline

According to the recent [State of Britain's hedgehogs](#) report, 'hogs are down by up to 30% in urban areas and 50% in rural areas since the Millennium. The urban picture is more promising, with hedgehog numbers on the increase in some areas where they are still present. It is generally agreed that hedgehogs are still widespread across Britain but more thinly so than they were.

There is no single cause of hedgehog decline, which makes it harder for us to tackle. The following are the main contributing factors. These may be more relevant in some areas than others, and may interact with each other. Help tackle the decline using our online resources and take action to save your local 'hogs.



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## Habitat Loss

Loss of nesting and foraging habitat through development (urban) and hedgerow removal (rural) reduces the **carrying capacity** of the landscape. Hedgehogs may struggle to find somewhere to breed and hibernate, and to find enough food to survive. The development of degraded arable land in particular has the potential to provide a net gain in habitat for hedgehogs

though, as gardens are a preferred habitat of our prickly neighbours. It is important that new gardens are designed well and connected through **hedgehog holes** in the fences.



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## Habitat Fragmentation

Lack of connectivity through hedgerow loss and degradation limits movement of rural 'hogs because they use these 'edges', where they are less exposed to danger, to navigate the rural landscape. Hedgehog populations can become isolated, which can have genetic effects, and eventually the isolated hedgehog populations may become unviable and locally extinct. In urban

areas, brick walls and new gravelboard fencing has the same effect for 'hogs and other ground-dwelling wildlife such as toads.



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## Roads

Up to 335,000 hedgehogs are estimated to die on British roads annually. Habitat suitability modelling suggests that suburbs and villages are **hotspots**, with 9% of Britain's road network potentially dangerous for 'hogs. Roadkill peaks in the summer months when they are most active, particularly July. Roads also further fragment the landscape and may reduce hedgehog density by

30%, impacting local populations, especially isolated ones. A new traffic sign featuring a hedgehog has now been designed to warn drivers of 'hogs and other small wildlife on roads where roadkill numbers are especially high.



British Hedgehog  
Preservation Society



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## Competition

Badger numbers are increasing, with an estimated 485,000 in England and Wales. They can predate hedgehogs and create a **landscape of fear** where 'hogs actively avoid them. They also compete for food (e.g. worms, beetles), and a badger will eat 5x the amount of worms as a

'hog. Badgers and foxes will also compete over food put out for hedgehogs in garden **refuge habitat**, with 'hogs often being losing the battle. The relationship between badgers and hedgehogs is complex. Find out more in our [Badgers and Hedgehogs](#) leaflet.



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## Chemicals

Chemical treatment of land (e.g. pesticides, molluscicides, fertilizers) can cause poisoning, but largely reduces invertebrate diversity and abundance. This can increase hedgehog mortality rates and impact fertility.

**Rodenticides** are a particular concern, potentially not breaking down when the target species dies. 'Hogs are at risk of direct or secondary poisoning through eating the carrion and maggots feasting on the carrion, with rodenticides building up along the **trophic levels** of the food chain. Males accumulate significantly more levels than females as they roam further, and are thought to be particularly at risk.



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## Injuries

Hedgehogs are brought to rescue centres with garden injuries (e.g. from strimmers, netting, dog bites). Little is known about how this affects populations, or indeed about 'hog rehabilitation because there is no centralised recording of information from wildlife hospitals or

hedgehog rehabilitation centres. If you are worried about a potentially injured hedgehog, contact the [British Hedgehog Preservation Society](#) helpline on 01584 89080.

Hedgehogs are not a Schedule 5 species under the Wildlife and Countryside Act, which would mean a legal obligation to survey and mitigate for them during development. They are listed under Schedule 6, the Wild Mammals Protection Act and the NERC Act which provide protection against killing, capturing and cruel treatment. Crucially, there is no legislative obligation to protect or provide habitat for hedgehogs. They use a matrix of habitats including grassland and woodland edge, which makes it logistically hard to protect. Check out the [Hedgehogs and development](#) leaflet that provides guidance on what can be done to help hedgehogs when development occurs.