



BRITAIN'S NATIONAL HEDGEHOG CONSERVATION STRATEGY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

West European hedgehogs (*Erinaceus europaeus*) are small, mainly insectivorous mammals that are native across much of Britain and are known to be in decline. Despite protection under Schedule 6 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, the latest *State of Britain's Hedgehogs* report demonstrates widespread losses, with the steepest declines in rural areas. There are signs of a possible stabilisation of urban populations, but still much reduced.

In 2020 the species was classed as 'Vulnerable to Extinction' in the UK. Earlier in 2007, it was made a priority conservation species under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP).

People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) and The British Hedgehog Preservation Society (BHPs) have been leading on hedgehog conservation in Britain for several decades and began their partnership work on the species in 2011. The two organisations work together to produce the *State of Britain's Hedgehogs* reports, commission research and to run Hedgehog Street, a public engagement campaign, among other activities.

To improve their strategic approach both organisations recognised the value in bringing in some external expertise. In 2022, they engaged the services of the International Union for Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) Conservation



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Planning Specialist Group (CPSG) to assist with the production of a new 'Conservation Strategy for Hedgehogs in Britain' via a collaborative, stakeholder-led process.

A one day threat analysis workshop in January 2023, involving 18 stakeholders, was followed by a three day strategy workshop in April 2023. This gathering of 30 stakeholders brought together participants from a diverse range of backgrounds, including NGOs, government agencies, the animal rehabilitation sector, the farming community, national infrastructure bodies, and academics.

Threats

The threat analysis identified six priorities for the strategy to address over the next ten years.

1. Decrease in availability and distribution of natural food and associated habitat
2. Increased vehicle collisions
3. Unintentional mortality and stress due to human intervention
4. Accidental death and misadventure
5. Toxin accumulation
6. Genetic isolation

Within each of these threats there is a degree of complexity and uncertainty; there is a need for additional information. This is the nature of most conservation work, though it is recognised that there is an important line between collecting enough data to reduce uncertainty, versus the risk of inaction and the "paralysis by analysis" that must be avoided given the current biodiversity crisis.

In the 10-year span of this strategy it is not realistic to aim to tackle all identified threats to hedgehogs. It is also likely that many readers of the full document will have their own thoughts on additional threats that could have

been included; predation by badgers is a good example of a threat that was discussed at length by multiple stakeholders over the production of this document, but has not been included as an individual threat. This is because identifying the requirements for a sustainable relationship between the two species will be an integral element addressed in the first threat.

In addition, not all threats are equal; the six threats listed above are all identified as priorities, but there can be no doubt that some will be having a bigger impact on hedgehog populations than others and the impact of a given threat will differ between rural and urban environments.

It is important to note that this document is a conservation strategy and not an action plan. As such, it presents potential actions that might be taken, but none of these are finalised. A formal action or delivery plan will be required for each goal in this strategy document. It is also a national document under which more localised action plans can be developed where needed.



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Governance

Taking the work outlined in this document forward over the next ten years will require effective governance. The delivery of the strategy will be driven by a PTES and BHPS-led management team and project staff. A steering group will provide oversight and evaluation of strategy delivery, and the management group will be supported by advice from themed working groups. This governance structure will bring together the available expertise on hedgehogs in Britain while ensuring dedicated, paid staff are focused on delivering the strategy on the ground.

Research

This process has demonstrated that there is a huge amount of knowledge available on hedgehogs and the threats they face, but has also highlighted that there are many areas of uncertainty in hedgehog conservation. The research priority section of the strategy document identifies where more information is needed to improve the efficacy of hedgehog conservation. Efforts are needed to improve our understanding of hedgehog habitat requirements, basic demography and causes of mortality, the effect of supplementary feeding and release from rehabilitation facilities, and the population genetics of Britain's hedgehogs. The identified research priorities are designed to guide research efforts and funding allocation for British hedgehogs over the next ten years.

With the publication of this document, we have an agreed strategy to conserve hedgehogs in Britain over the coming decade and clarification of research needs to support hedgehog conservation much further into the future. Now the real work to safeguard one of our most iconic small mammals begins.



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**Stakeholders involved in creating the National Hedgehog Conservation Strategy include:*

The British Hedgehog Preservation Society (BHPS), British Veterinary Zoological Society (BVZS), British Wildlife Rehabilitation Council (BWRC), Forestry Commission England, Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT), Gower Bird Hospital, Hartpury University, Hedgehog Friendly Campus, idverde, Institute of Zoology, Institute of Zoology - Garden Wildlife Health project, IUCN SSC CPSG, Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Mammal Society, National Farmers' Union, National Highways, Natural England, Natural Resources Wales, Nature Friendly Farming Network, NatureScot, Network Rail, Nottingham Trent University, People's Trust for Endangered Species, Royal Horticultural Society, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), Royal Zoological Society of Scotland, Suffolk Wildlife Trust, Taylor Wimpey, University of Cambridge/ Conservation Evidence, University of Oxford Wildlife Conservation Research Unit and Aalborg University (Denmark).