

*British Hedgehog
Preservation Society*

Caring for Hoglets



Part of the

Know your Hedgehog

series

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Rearing hoglets should not be undertaken lightly. It is essential to provide adequate constant warmth and regular feeding and toileting. Hoglets can deteriorate very quickly especially if they are not kept at an even temperature. Their best chance of survival is with someone experienced with their care. If you decide to continue with their care do find a local contact who will be able to help you through any problems. Call the BHPS (01584 890801) for details of such contacts.

There is so much involved in their care that it cannot all be included in a short leaflet. Indeed a whole chapter is devoted to rearing hoglets in the BHPS's book *Hedgehog Rehabilitation* by Kay Bullen (available from the address below). If urgent BHPS can email a copy of the chapter to you on request.

Any wild animal or pet can carry diseases or have skin problems that can be passed on to humans and indeed other animals. Good hygiene and the use of gloves can help reduce this risk.

When you may find them

Hoglets may be found in May, June or July, when the first litters are generally born, and in August-September, when the second litters are born. The average size of a litter is four to five.

Why you may find them

If the mother is disturbed soon after the birth, she may desert her hoglets. So if you have a nest in your garden do not keep looking in it as this may cause the mother to desert the babies. Many hoglets are made orphans when their mothers are killed by motor vehicles or die because of garden or farmland hazards.

Where you may find them

The hoglets will probably be in or near their nest, which often will be under a shed, in a hedgerow, pile of garden debris or a compost heap. You may hear their distressed, shrill, bird-like piping. If you

find one or two, the area should be searched, as there may be others, either still in the nest or nearby.

What to do when you find them

Abandoned hoglets are very vulnerable creatures and are often found in a poor state. For survival, human help is needed quickly, and generally three things are needed urgently – WARMTH, TOILETING and FLUIDS. Do not give hoglets fluids by mouth if the hoglets are cold. Warm fluids before giving.

Stress reduction

Wild animals suffer stress in an unnatural environment and hedgehogs are no exception. The hoglets will need to be in a quiet, calm atmosphere and handled only when necessary.

How to provide warmth for them

The hoglets must be kept in a warm room. They should be placed in a small cardboard box or similar container, lined with a towel. For bedding use more old (but not threadbare) towels. Place a hot water bottle, filled with hot – not boiling water - wrapped in a towel or warm material, in the bottom of the box (a reptile heat mat or heated propagator may be used instead) Put the hoglets on this and cover with further bedding. The hot water bottle will need to be changed every few hours, even at night, to keep the hoglets warm. Litter mates can be kept together.

One week old Hoglet



©Jane Durrant

Hygiene

It is important that the hoglets, their bedding and feeding equipment are kept scrupulously clean. The bedding should be changed regularly and the feeding equipment sterilised. After dealing with each litter, hands should be washed and weighing equipment cleaned.

Weigh the hoglets daily and chart their growth. Mark them by painting a few prickles with nail varnish – each hoglets' mark will be in a different place. Don't use red colours in case it is mistaken for blood and the hedgehog is unnecessarily 'rescued'.

How to feed them

This will depend largely on the age and weight of the hedgehogs, and the following schedule is a suggested guide: -

Up to 2 weeks old (Weight about 1-3ozs, 30-85gms) - Very regular "hand" feeding of about 1-3mls approx. every 2-4 hours (or on demand!). Kitten and puppy powdered milk substitutes are often used as is goats' milk, but a lactose free or low in lactose milk like that sold in pet shops or supermarkets for kittens and cats can be used in the short term. Multi-vitamin drops (Abidec) should be given daily [4-5 drops] in one of the feeds especially if frozen milk substitute is used. Warm the milk substitute before feeding. Their poo will be a peppermint green colour and be in oval globules when they are being fed on just their milk substitute mixture. This is normal. The mixture can be given using a small syringe, dropper or pipette, with a small piece of soft tubing attached to the end. The hoglets will accept sustenance best if lying on their backs in your hand with head facing upwards and tail to the floor. By weighing daily you can check they are gaining weight. If they are not gaining, increase the number of feeds or the amount given at each feed.

Their eyes open at 2 weeks enabling the hoglets to see their food. If problems with the eyes occur, they should be bathed with warm water using a separate piece of cotton wool for each eye. A jam jar lid of milk substitute can be left in the box from now on, but keep feeding using the syringe etc. A little Heinz Baby food (meat variety) can also be added to thicken the milk substitute. By two weeks they should be fed every four hours. If their weight gain levels off add well-mashed meat to the milk substitute or add it anyway at above two and a half weeks of age.

3-4 weeks old (Weight about 4 to 6ozs, 110-170gms) - Frequency of feeds will be four hourly and food should be varied by adding small amounts of protein e.g. tinned pet food mulched in quantities of milk substitute. Lower front teeth appear at three weeks. Around three and a half weeks you can stop toileting them and they will probably be feeding themselves. From 4 weeks on, if over 200gms, the heat could be removed but check that the hoglets can stay warm without the extra heat. A small dish of water for drinking can also be provided at this point.

5-6 weeks old (Weight about 7 to 9oz, 200-260gms) - By now the hoglet should be feeding well. Provide a dish of roughly mashed up meat and milk substitute and a dish of water - as they become more nocturnal they will stop feeding during the day so will only require food at night. At 6-7 weeks the milk substitute can be stopped.

In captivity hoglets put on weight much more quickly than in the wild. Weight guides given are for wild hedgehogs, hand reared hedgehogs can weigh 500 or 600gms at 8 weeks.

How to toilet them

Mothers usually lick the hoglet's tummy to stimulate it to pass urine. In care we use a cotton bud dipped in olive oil or baby oil. This is vibrated as light as a feather over the anus and vulva or penis in an up and down, head to tail direction. The hoglets should relax, stretch out their back legs and urinate (they will also defecate). This should be done on arrival and after every feed until the hoglet is about 3½ weeks old.

What to do after feeding them

It is important that all parts of the hoglets should be kept as clean as possible. After each meal wipe them over with cotton wool, moistened with warm water and olive oil, or a drop of baby oil or lotion. This not only cleans off any spilt food but also keeps their skin moist. As hoglets are very prone to infections, the cleaning process also acts as a regular health check.

How to deal with simple ailments

Some wild hedgehogs carry fleas but these can usually be cleared by dusting with any flea or mite powder used for pet birds (be very careful when using it on small babies and always avoid the eyes, ears, nose and mouth). Maggots may be found and will all need to be removed, check in the ears, eyes and mouth as well as externally. These can be treated with an anti-maggot preparation if you have one available. Fly eggs can usually be picked off with tweezers and any damage then checked. Obvious wounds can be bathed in warm salt water. However, if you are in any doubt about the physical condition of the hoglets, do contact a hedgehog carer or a veterinary surgeon.

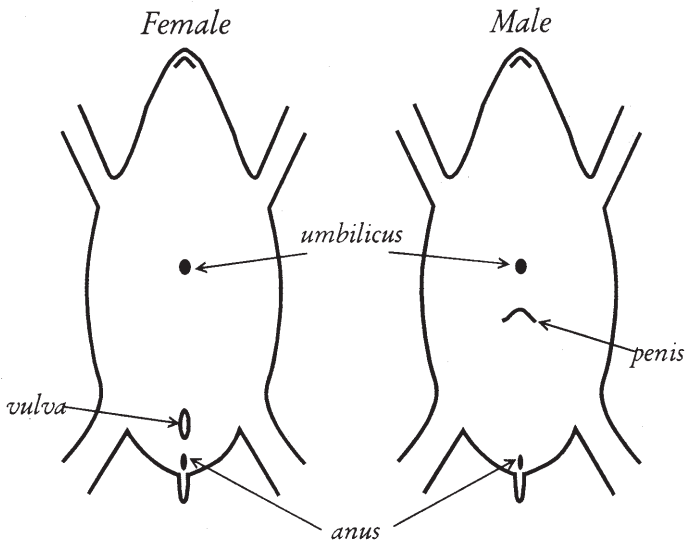
How to release them

If the hoglets were part of a May/July litter they should be released into the wild as soon as it is clear they can fend for themselves – they should weigh about 450gms and be at least 8 weeks old. If you have hedgehogs that regularly visit your garden then the hoglet could be released there; if not try and find a garden where other hedgehogs are present (they are not territorial). Do not release during bad weather or drought conditions and release in the late evening when it is dark. As a “back-up”, put out some food in case they return.

If the hoglets were part of a late litter they should not be released unless they weigh at least 600gms you may like to ring BHPS to discuss release weights. Below 450gms they may struggle to survive hibernation in the wild and therefore should be housed indoors and given plenty of food and water until ready for release. Do not allow them to become obese (eg maximum of 1kg).

How to sex them

Male and female hoglets both have tails, with the anus at the base of their bodies. They also both have an umbilicus (belly button) and nipples. There the similarity ends. The male's penis is underneath the umbilicus whereas the female's vulva is just above the anus. In very young hoglets it can be difficult to tell the difference as the male's penis is nearer to the anus at birth. It moves forward as the hoglet grows.



Self Anointing

When you start introducing new flavours to the hoglet's diet it may carry out the strange behaviour known as self-anointing. The hoglet will flick frothy saliva over its spines, contorting itself into awkward positions so that it can reach every part of its spiny coat. The procedure can last from just a few minutes to an hour or so and will stop suddenly. It is not known why hedgehogs do this although many theories have been put forward. It seems to be triggered by strange smells and tastes.

FACTS YOU MIGHT LIKE TO KNOW ABOUT HEDGEHOGS:

The length of a hedgehog pregnancy is usually 32 days but can be somewhat variable. It is believed that if for instance, a cold spell of weather in spring brings about a shortage of natural food, a pregnant hedgehog will resume hibernation and the development of her embryos will slow down. When she is active again the embryos continue to grow and the pregnancy is lengthened by the same amount of time as the hibernation period.

When hoglets are born they are grey on top with pink faces and bellies and do not have visible spines. These are under the skin covered by a layer of fluid, like a large water blister. Soon after birth the fluid is absorbed and the spines erupt through the skin.

The new spines are white but brown ones appear amongst them from 36 hours old and by the time the hoglet is fifteen days old the white ones are hardly visible.

Hedgehogs shed their spines just as humans shed their hair.

It is thought that 1 in 5 of all hoglets die before they leave the nest.

When hedgehog litters leave the nest and disperse they are unlikely to meet again as they live solitary lives.

Hedgehogs are not usually sexually mature in the year of their birth but commence breeding in their second year. However overwintered juveniles grow and mature quickly, so sexes should be kept separate when overwintering.

*For further information please send a s.a.e. to:-
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