

HEDGEHOGS ON TV

A CODE OF CONDUCT FOR PRODUCTION COMPANIES AND WILDLIFE REHABILITATORS



**British Hedgehog
Preservation Society**

www.britishhedgehogs.org.uk

Charity number 1164542



The British Veterinary Zoological Society

www.bvzs.co.uk

Charity number 1000452



www.bwrc.org.uk

Charity number 1157841

people's
trust for
endangered
species

www.ptes.org

Charity number: 274206



www.rspca.org.uk

Charity number 219099



www.secretworld.org

Charity number 1097119



www.swccharity.org

Charity number 1145477



www.valewildlife.org.uk

Charity number 702888

European hedgehogs are our nation's favourite wild animal.

When there is a piece of conservation news about the plight of the hedgehog, or some new research findings, there is a flurry of media interest.

This interest often leads to disappointment as TV production teams discover the Hedgehog Street campaign, run jointly by the British Hedgehog Preservation Society (BHPS) and People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTES), will not supply hedgehogs for appearances in the studio or on location.

This is not just the policy of the Hedgehog Street campaign, but of responsible wildlife rehabilitation organisations across the country including the RSPCA, Vale Wildlife Hospital, and Shepreth Wildlife Conservation Charity.

This Code of Conduct seeks to explain the reasons why the use of hedgehogs in studio settings is considered unreasonable as it raises serious welfare concerns.

We hope that this will benefit both TV production teams and also wildlife rehabilitators to ensure the full impact of taking part has been considered. Nobody wants to cause hedgehogs unnecessary stress and suffering.

Hedgehogs are the UK's only spiny mammal, and thanks to this protective coat, have lost their 'fight or flight' reaction to threat. Most animals will either bite you or run away; the hedgehog will first 'frown' to protect its face/head and then roll up and wait for danger to pass.

The significance of this behaviour is that it allows sick or injured hedgehogs to be captured with relative ease - and makes their care in captivity easier too. While we know that hedgehogs can be successfully rehabilitated into the wild, recent research from the University of Oxford's Dr Sophie Lund-Rasmussen has shown that when in care, they do suffer from elevated stress, as measured by changes in cortisol levels.

Keeping a hedgehog captive with the intention of using it for 'show' causes unjustifiable stress, stress which is 'invisible' due to the behaviour of the animal described above. Permanent captives that are deemed unreleasable are often used for this type of performance, but this relies on keeping permanently disabled wild animals captive, which is at odds with the whole rehabilitation process.

Hedgehogs are also nocturnal. This is important when it comes to putting them in the public eye. One of the key identifiers of a hedgehog in distress is seeing it out in daytime. Showing a hedgehog in daylight, without adequate explanation of why, (for example, it being in a rehabilitation

centre), can lead members of the public to not recognise the potential problems. In addition, the unnatural surroundings will create extra stress for the animal.

It is understandable why producers prefer to film a hedgehog during the day - it is much easier than doing so at night! But the hedgehog's welfare is the important thing here, not getting the best footage at any cost.

The advice we give is to only handle hedgehogs as part of a recognised research programme or to provide essential care to sick, injured or orphaned hedgehogs, and then only with caution, and always keeping handling to a minimum. Seeing them handled unnecessarily on television risks encouraging viewers to have a go at handling hedgehogs themselves - or to try and get one as a pet (there is already evidence of wild European hedgehogs being offered for sale to meet the demand for exotic pets created by the popularity of African pygmy hedgehogs).

Hedgehogs also hibernate, spending most of November to March hidden away and deeply unconscious. Hoping to film a hedgehog in the wild over winter is going to be pretty much impossible without causing a hibernating animal distress.

The demand for a hedgehog in a studio is born of the simple fact that they cannot complain - expressing stress through stillness. When it comes to other stories about British wildlife, there is usually no requirement for the species to be brought into the studio. It would be chaotic for every swan story to require one on the red sofa!

Alternative options

This is not all negative, there are solutions - solutions which can help create far more entertaining and informative television without upsetting hedgehogs!

The Hedgehog Street campaign has an archive of video clips of hedgehogs behaving naturally in people's gardens. These are available for broadcast use on request. Most of these are taken remotely by 'trail cameras' that

are triggered by the movement of the hedgehog and therefore do not cause the animal any disturbance and can easily be cut into interviews with hedgehog experts.

The British Hedgehog Preservation Society can often suggest suitably responsible hedgehog rehabilitators where it would be possible to film safely at their rescue centres. Many wildlife rescue centres will allow crews to come and film onsite - and as long as disturbance is kept to a minimum, to the rescues as well as the hedgehogs, this is a good solution. Hedgehog Street spokespeople may well be able travel to the rehabilitation centres and be interviewed on location.

Hedgehog Street also has a network of Hedgehog Champions throughout Britain; volunteers who have made positive changes to their garden and, as a result, frequently see hedgehogs (though as with all wildlife, this isn't guaranteed). Filming on location with Champions can often provide a human story to accompany the hedgehog piece and demonstrates practical things viewers can get involved with.

The organisations who have signed this Code request that production teams around the UK recognise that hedgehogs are not suitable for bringing into studios, and that to do so causes unnecessary suffering. We also call on rehabilitators to commit to not supplying animals for display.