

Hedgehogs

Introducing hedgehogs

A hedgehog is a small mammal with prickles on the back of its head and body. If it is frightened, a hedgehog curls up tightly, so that the soft parts of its body are on the inside. Few enemies can get at a hedgehog when it is curled up.

There are lots of different kinds of hedgehog. They live in Britain and the rest of Europe, right across to Russia and East China. In the hot, dry areas of Africa and Asia there are desert hedgehogs. They dig burrows to get away from the hot sun and to hide from their enemies.

Not all animals that look like hedgehogs belong to the same family. Porcupines and the Australian spiny anteater have prickles on their backs but they do not belong to the same family as the hedgehog.

How hedgehogs live

Hedgehogs live on their own. If they are with another hedgehog, it is usually because they are sharing a feeding area, such as a lawn.

Like most mammals, hedgehogs have their own special smell. The hedgehog's smell is quite strong. A hedgehog can tell the age of another hedgehog by its smell, and whether it is a male or a female. Usually a hedgehog's smell warns other hedgehogs to keep out of its way.

What hedgehogs look like

The hedgehog's spines, or prickles, are like stiff hairs. Each spine is about 22 mm long. Older hedgehogs have more spines than younger ones. A young hedgehog's spines are shiny and in good condition, but the spines of an old hedgehog are often damaged.



A hedgehog uses a special set of muscles to raise and lower its prickles. When it is frightened, a hedgehog tightens the muscles around its sides. This is how it curls up. A hedgehog can stay curled up for a long time without getting tired.

A hedgehog's small bright eyes are not very good at seeing things. A hedgehog uses its good sense of smell and hearing to find its way around.

Joanna Jessop from *Hedgehogs* (Wayland)

