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Autumn Juvenile Hedgehogs

These small hedgehogs can often be seen in the Autumn/Winter months. They are usually fit and healthy, but do not weigh enough to safely hibernate through the Winter. This is where we can all do our bit to help.

If they are under about 600g, they need to be overwintered. For very small ones, this should be somewhere inside – e.g. in a hutch or box at a temperature above 18 degrees to prevent hibernation. They need a regular source of food – meaty cat or dog food is ideal, dry can be fed, meal worms can be given as a high energy feed source. Feed twice a day if underweight, otherwise mainly at night to encourage nocturnal activity. Fresh water should be readily available given in a shallow container rather than a water bottle. Sheets of newspaper or an old towel are best for lining the box. Strips of newspaper, hay or straw can wrap around legs and cause damage. Be prepared to change the bedding regularly as they produce large amounts of faeces. Weigh them daily initially and keep a record of their weights. Any that are losing weight should get attention.

Larger hedgehogs can be kept in a garage, or if you have an enclosed garden, in a hedgehog shelter. St Tiggywinkles have excellent fact sheets on looking after hedgehogs and even how to build a hedgehog home (www.sttiggywinkles.org.uk/fact_sheets). This can be lined with dry leaves as bedding. Overwintered hedgehogs should not be released until April and when a spell of warm weather is expected.

There are a number of problems that can affect young hedgehogs including parasites such as worms or ticks, dehydration and ringworm. They can also suffer trauma due to bites or road traffic accidents. If you are worried about their health we are happy to look at them for you. In serious cases euthanasia may need to be considered rather than treatment. Unfortunately we don't have the facilities at Croft Veterinary Centre to care for hedgehogs long term. Both St Tiggywinkles near Aylesbury (01844 292292, www.sttiggywinkles.org.uk) and Vale Wildlife Hospital near Tewkesbury (01326 882288, www.valewildlife.org.uk) offer excellent advice about care, and can help with longer term treatment and rehabilitation.

One final word of warning. Please be aware that hedgehogs can carry diseases that can pass to humans. The two most common are Salmonella which can cause food poisoning, and ringworm which is a fungal infection that affects the skin. Try and wear gloves whenever handling the hedgehog or soiled bedding, and always wash your hands thoroughly afterwards.