



Hedgehogs in Ratby

Ratby resident, Mary Hartfield, is a self-confessed Hedgehog champion and a foster carer for weak or injured hogs. She would love to see more residents in the village make space for Hedgehogs by simply making a hole in their garden fence to let them roam. Several villagers have already done this, helping to create a Ratby Hedgehog Highway. [Read more about Mary's Hedgehogs below.](#)



I first noticed Hedgehogs visiting our garden during lockdown in 2020. We noticed a hog eating discarded bird food. My neighbour said it also visited her garden and she was putting

kitten biscuits and water out each night. I used to think they ate bread and milk but I now know they are lactose intolerant and this is definitely not good for them!

We wondered how the hedgehogs were getting into the garden because we thought it was very secure. However, we found a hole behind our shed that they were able to use.

Since 2020 I have continued to feed the hogs and to learn all about them. Until that first sighting in 2020, I had not seen a Hedgehog for years. I had not even seen many squashed ones on the road. I have now learned Hedgehogs are an endangered species. This is due to many factors but one major thing that has led to the decline in the population is that we all have secure fencing and this prevents them roaming from garden to garden safely away from roads. I now have a purpose made hole under my gate to allow them in and out of the garden.

I have a wildlife camera which I put out at night to watch the antics they get up to! I have made a simple feeding station from an upturned plastic box. A 10cm hole cut in it seems to keep the cats out.

I have found several hogs out in the day in my garden but this generally means they are unwell. The only time hogs come out during the day is in the breeding season. A female may dash out in between feeding the babies to get food or water. If you see a hog looking quite healthy, moving with purpose, during the day in spring or late summer, it's best left alone. I have rescued 5 or 6 hogs that were clearly unwell. I took them to a local rescue centre for care. Sadly, two of them were too unwell to save and died, however, the others have been nursed back to health thanks to the skill and dedication of the trained volunteers.

Recently I have taken several hogs to Rachel in Desford, who is part of Digby's Hedgehog Rescue. She said they are always looking for volunteers to become foster carers to look after hogs that just need to reach a good weight before they are released back into the wild. They also need people who are prepared to release a hog. They need to be in an area where other hogs visit and they need to provide supplementary feeding each night for a while.

I have now become a Hedgehog foster carer. Since February I have had the two hogs that I rescued and took to a rescue centre, returned to me fully fit but just needing to increase in weight. They have both been successfully released back into my garden. It's very satisfying because I feel I am helping not only the Hedgehogs but also these skillful volunteers in their work. By fostering, I help free up space for them to help other injured or sick hogs. I never attempt to tame the hogs. I handle them as little as possible, just weighing them daily.

If anyone finds a Hedgehog, they are worried about, I am more than happy to be contacted for advice and I will collect them and get them to a Rescue Centre.

It would be lovely if residents of Ratby, who feel able to, could make a hole in their fence or gate to welcome the hedgehogs. If you don't want to feed them, just leave a bowl of water down. Look into how you can make your garden hedgehog and wildlife friendly. Keep a

corner untidy with dead leaves for bugs to live. Hedgehogs do not really eat slugs unless they are desperate because they can give them lungworm, but they'll eat many other bugs!

A source of good information is [Hedgehog Street](#) or the [British Hedgehog Society](#).

Mary Hartfield



If you see a Hedgehog in Ratby (or a dead one on the road), please let us know the date and the location. Either submit a record on the NatureSpot website (www.naturespot.org) or drop a quick email to davidnicholls125@gmail.com