

## Hedgehog

*Erinaceus europaeus* (Linnaeus, 1758)

Order: Erinaceomorpha

The top of the hedgehog's body is covered with dark brown spines, with creamy bases and tips, with pale fur on the underside and around the face. The head and body measures 160-300mm with a tail of 15-30mm. Weight varies widely with seasonal changes and differs between the sexes, up to 1.4kg. The black droppings are 50mm long, 10mm wide, and contain insect remains. Prints of the hindfoot are 40-45mm long, 25mm wide, the forefoot 40mm long, 25mm wide

Summer nests made of grass, lined with moss and leaves, are found in woodland and hedges. Winter nests (hibernaculum) of neatly packed grass, dry bracken and leaves, are made at the base of trees, in tree hollows, compost heaps and old rabbit burrows.



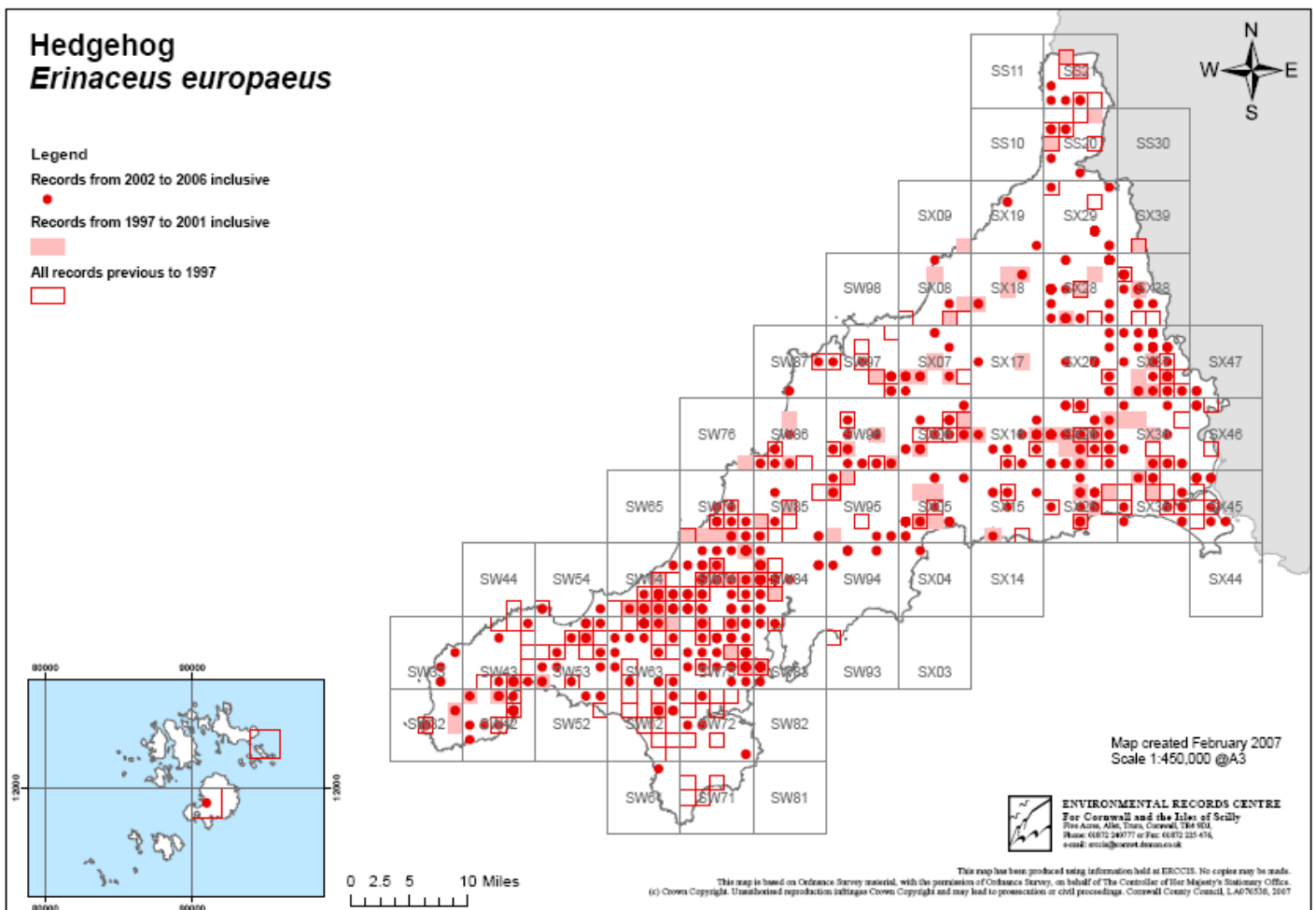
Hedgehogs hibernate over the winter period, normally from October, but sometimes as late as December, to March/April. On emergence they mate and then disperse. The young (2 – 7 in a litter) are suckled for about four weeks and forage with the mother at 3 weeks. The male takes no part in parenting. The female may produce a second litter.

Hedgehogs are mainly solitary, with males ranging up to 3km each night.

Hedgehogs can be found in a variety of habitats: hedgerows, deciduous woodland, scrub, grassland, sand dunes with scrub, rough pasture and gardens. They are apparently abundant in gardens and parks in built-up areas but rare in dense woodland, marshes and high moorland.

The Hedgehog is largely nocturnal finding its food by sound and scent. Ground dwelling invertebrates form the major part of the hedgehog: slugs, earthworms, beetles and snails. They will also eat bird eggs, nestlings as well as carrion.

The hedgehog's spines help protect it from most predators, but they are occasionally eaten by foxes, badgers and tawny owl. The main causes of death are by man: cars, lawn-mowers, slug pellets, bonfires, steep sided ponds and persecution as a result of its predation on game birds.



#### Local distribution and key sites

**Number of records per date class**  
 2002 to 2006 inclusive 733  
 1997 to 2001 inclusive 171  
 All records previous to 1997 368  
**Total 1272**

The hedgehog is widely distributed throughout lowland England where there is ground cover for shelter and nesting. The latest Mammals on Roads survey found that hedgehogs spotted per mile has fallen in England as a whole, by more than 20% since the survey started in 2001. The east of England and West Midlands have seen the biggest decline. In Europe the hedgehog is found from Scandinavia to Northwestern Russia where it occurs together with the Eastern Hedgehog (*E. concolor*) over a band from the Baltic to the Adriatic.

Hedgehogs are legally protected in the UK under the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981. In November 2008 they became a UK Biodiversity Action Plan [BAP] priority species.

#### Survey Methods

- Live sightings
- Road kill surveys
- Garden surveys

#### Did you know?

At birth the spines are white and soft ; they harden and colour by 4 weeks. Some hedgehogs can be very pale and albinos are not uncommon. Fossil records suggest the hedgehog has been around for about 15 million years. Shakespeare mentions hedgehogs in 'The Tempest' and 'Midsummer Night's Dream' and he refers to 'hedgepigs' and 'urchins'. Hedgehog skins were once used for combing, or carding, wool.

#### Key references

Morris, P., (1983) Hedgehogs. Whittlet Books

Websites: British Hedgehog Preservation Society <http://www.britishhedgehogs.org.uk/>