

## **Setting up a health surveillance scheme for wild hedgehogs in Great Britain**

Survey data point to a substantial decline in Britain's hedgehog population in recent decades, across large parts of its range. A number of factors such as habitat loss and fragmentation, and increasing badger densities, have been cited as being responsible, but none appear to explain the declines fully. This project aims to investigate whether disease is a causative factor in hedgehog population declines: infectious disease has caused population declines in other native UK species, and it is a well-recognised cause of species' declines and extinctions globally. Many centres have considerable expertise in hedgehog rehabilitation, but there appears to be limited information on the health status of hedgehogs in the wild. In recent years there have been a number of reports of unusual disease syndromes in hedgehogs that warrant further investigation. The hedgehog is a Priority Species under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan, which further necessitates the establishment of a specific health surveillance scheme for this species.

We aim to establish a collaborative health surveillance scheme that involves as many interested parties as possible. We will receive reports of sick and dead hedgehogs from members of the public, and conduct post mortem examinations on hedgehogs that have been found dead in the wild, or died soon after they have been found. Our data will be compared with population data to establish whether there are correlations between hedgehog sickness/disease and declines. We will publicise our findings to the wildlife rehabilitation community, among others.

During the presentation I will value wildlife rehabilitators' feedback, and highlight ways in which they can assist us with the project.

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