**Nursing of European Hedgehogs in General Practice**

On Tuesday 26th April, Gemma Crowley MSc (Wild Animal Biology) BSc (Hons) RVN delivered a fantastic CPD webinar on Nursing of European Hedgehogs in General Practice. The session was organised by Sarah Heritage RVN, Regional Representative for Gloucestershire and Herefordshire.

There were more questions than we had time to answer, however Gemma has very kindly answered these for us below.

* **Can puppy milk be used for hedgehogs, or is kitten milk best?**

Kitten milk is preferential, but if you only have puppy then it’s not harmful.

* **Do you advise against keeping a wild hedgehog in captivity?**

The big question is quality of life, can they express normal behaviour? Are they able to thrive not just survive? It does sometimes depend on individuals but on the whole, I don’t think you can replicate a natural experience for European hedgehogs. Having said that, some blind and three-legged captive hedgehogs cope remarkably well and exhibit natural behaviours.

* **How can I tell the difference between a sick hedgehog or a lactating/pregnant hedgehog, if I see it during the daytime?**

Normally a pregnant or lactating female will move with purpose, often carrying nest materials and travelling at speed. Sick or injured hedgehogs are often quite unstable or wobbly, are perhaps lying in lateral recumbency, or don’t move if you approach and touch them.

* **Any advice for those working in practices who don’t want to treat hedgehogs?**

That’s a tricky one… All vets and veterinary nurses have an obligation to provide emergency care for wildlife. According to the RSPCA, during practice hours small wild mammals and wild birds should be treated free of charge if they are brought to a veterinary surgery. Vets are obliged by their professional code to provide any necessary pain relief or euthanasia. Obviously if hedgehogs are admitted that do not require emergency care or euthanasia and simply feeding up, then that is up to the individual practice unfortunately.

* **I have helped out at a rescue which uses large plastic storages boxes to house hedgehogs and overwinter them. I wasn’t sure they were very good - how do you feel about them and are there guidelines on a minimal size needed, especially if they are looked after over winter?**

I don’t really have any experience with overwintering hedgehogs in plastic boxes, when I assisted a local rescue and kept hedgehogs at home I always used “critter cages” which are essentially Guinea pig cages with plastic sides and bottom with a wire bar lid. I’m not sure how much ventilation would be provided with a full plastic box and I imagine the smell is quite something! However, most rescues have very limited funds and providing juvenile hedgehogs with somewhere to over winter, even if slightly small and poorly ventilated, is better than the alternative which in the wild would be death.

* **I’ve always been told not to use fish flavour food for hedgehogs - is that true?**

Hedgehogs can eat fish flavoured food, there is no nutritional difference between fish flavour or any other, they normally just don’t like it!

* **Zygomatic arch fractures - is it just a matter of supportive treatment and then re-x-ray in 4-6 weeks?**

Yes, they normally heal quite well and don’t require any intervention.

* **What is the best kind of heat source to use when overwintering?**

At home I used heat discs which can last up to 6 hours, but you can also use covered heat pads and lamps for smaller hogs.

* **Current research shows that hedgehogs don't need to be overwintered now, what is Tiggywinkles’ protocol?**

I would be really interested to read this research. Tiggywinkles’ protocol is as follows:

Underweight hedgehogs will not survive hibernation, so need to be kept indoors until April time. These hedgehogs are usually juveniles, born too late in the year to put on the weight they need to survive hibernation. If these late babies haven’t reached the safe weight of 600g by the end of November and we experience a cold snap, they may go into hibernation and will quickly burn through their limited fat reserves.

Overwintered hedgehogs need to be kept indoors in a constant-temperature room (around 65°F or 18°C) to prevent them from trying to hibernate.

Hedgehogs tend to start hibernating from late December, although this is dependent on the weather and the individual hedgehog. If you see a small hedgehog at this time and are worried it weighs under 600g, please get in touch with your local wildlife rescue centre, as it may need to be overwintered. You can find your nearest wildlife rescue centre on [www.helpwildlife.co.uk](http://www.helpwildlife.co.uk).

To help hedgehogs build up their fat reserves in time for winter, please put out a shallow dish of water and some meaty flavoured tinned cat or dog food in the evenings.

Thank you very much to Gemma and Sarah for organising this excellent webinar.

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