



SOUTH AFRICA's HEDGEHOG BREEDERS ASSOCIATION

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EXAMPLE OF A BREEDING PROGRAM:

This is not fool proof, as females may not conceive, and if needed to be placed again with a male, the roster will shift one month on, if I do not have already another female booked for mating the next month, also depending on age of hedgehog and waiting list. Sometimes, these things will cause you to have less than 4 litters from a female. Never to exceed 4 litters from one female. If a female proofed to be not suitable breeding material, she will be retired before due date. This will then be recorded as such on the females chart. Record to be kept of all litters born. Records to be kept of deaths and causes. Also keep record of each baby, copies of birth certificates, who is the owner etc.

Please see also at bottom of this, the BREEDING PARTS 1-5; that is requirements and preparations to be done BEFORE attempting breeding and info on what can be expected.

BREEDING PROGRAM:

Female 1- Born January 2021

First litter (6 months old) – she would be placed with male 10 July 2021. Babies expected to be born 14 August, and will be 6 weeks of age 25 September- close to end of the month. Babies always to be available month end to avoid cancellations due to people perhaps being cash strapped in the middle of the month.

She will have a 5- 6 month recovery break

Second litter (1 year and 1 month old) placed with male 10 February 2022, babies born on 17 March, and babies age 6 weeks on the 28th of April 2022

After babies left the den, no breeding during winter, this also falls part of her resting period.

Third litter (1 year, 7 months old) Female placed with male 10 August 2022, babies born 14 September 2022, six weeks on 26 October 2022.

Fourth and Final litter- (2 years, 1 month old) Placed with male 10 February 2023, babies born 17 March, six weeks at 28 April 2022

Female will be now retired from breeding as she will be 2 years and 3 months old when the babies leave the den. Breeders retire their females between the age of 2 years and 2 and a half years. This is to extend their life span, and keep them healthy and not over bred them.

BREEDING PART 1:

First of all: There is not a market anymore. Will you have owners for the new babies?

FEMALES- Must be at least 6 months and not older than 1 and a half year for their first mating. Reason is that their pelvic bones DO grow closer as they aged without breeding. You also need to stop breeding with her at the age of 2 years. That is why professional breeders start at the age of 6 months, in order to get at least 3 litters from the female before retiring. There MUST be 5 months or more between litters to give the female chance to recover.

MALES: Professional breeders only use males at the age of 6 months. However, males CAN breed from the age of 7 weeks. Reason for only at 6 months is to ensure high fertility rate and "skills" or "performance". A young male might be insecure or intimidated by an older female and for success breeders wait until 6 months.

Males and females must be healthy. It is crucial to know that they are not related in any way with one another to prevent inbreeding. It is best to buy a breeding pair with lineage. That is, hedgehogs that the breeder has proof of the parents / grandparents details. Don't just grab a petshop hedgehog and start breeding! You don't know the history of those hedgehogs.

BREEDING PART 2:

Right, you have now obtain a breeding pair with proper lineage, right age, now what?

Is your female hedgehog friendly? Is she very relaxed when handled? Never ever breed with an moody temperamental female! The babies will take after their mother in personality and if you sell aggressive babies you will get a bad reputation. Hedgehog babies learn from their mothers that huffing and puffing are associated with humans. This is extremely important. Your female must trust you also and allow you to peek in the nest to see if everything is okay. Aggressive females are more likely to kill their babies for the slightest reason.

Step one will be to weigh your female and write it down. Keeping record of her weight is important.

Always place the female with the male, in his cage, this is for him to have an advantage of confidence. Remove all objects, toys to prevent possible injuries. Only leave the sleeping den and food, water bowls. The male will chase the female around, while making whistling noises through out. This is part of the mating ritual. The female might play a bit hard to get. Usually mating take

place the very same day but breeders allow for the female to stay 5 days with the male. Some will remove the female after 5 days for a few days and put her back again for another 5 days to ensure success.

That is up to the breeder. Do not leave her permanently with the male!

You might see blood on the females back. This is when the male bites onto her quills during mating and the quills poked his mouth.

You need to check that they are not fighting while together in one cage. Hedgehogs are solitary animals and even during mating fighting may happen.

Mark on the calendar when you first placed your hedgehog with the male. Count of 35 days and mark that as expected date of birth. It might be longer than 35 days. Gestation is 35 to 38 days, but if the female conceived on day 3 for example she won't give birth on your marked "date of birth".

The expected date of birth is crucial, because this will determine on when you need to clean her cage for the last time before the babies arrived.

BREEDING PART 3:

Okey, your female was with the male. You have marked it of on the calendar, you have weighed her. Now what? You need to provide extra treats, vitamins, Protexin (probiotic) for her now.

You need to weigh her every week, preferably on the same day of the week to monitor her weight gain. By week 2 she will have gained 20 grams or more. What I forgot to mention in part 1 is that your female might display a change in personality when pregnant and during the period that she has babies.

3 days before her expected birthdate you need to clean out her cage, give her a last bath and nail trimming as for the next couple of weeks, you won't be able to do so. Keep her used bedding, used blanket (placed it in a plastic bag) It must be unwashed, as you will need it later, I will explain in the next part. Ensure that your female has a proper nest / sleeping den that would be suitable for raising babies. Best is to have a nest with a lid that you can easily lift up to check up on babies without disturbing the mom. I use plastic containers, see attachment video. Your nest must be dark, in order for your female to feel safe in it. This must be placed in her cage prior to birth of babies so that female get use to the new nest in her cage.

Best bedding for babies is shredded fleece strips. Or recycled paper bedding. If using fleece, Make sure there is no loose threads!

When using blankets it happens often that babies end up between folds and get trampled by the mom. Remove all extra pouches, sleeping hides, tunnels etc before birthdate, this is to prevent the female to make a nest in a unsuitable place.

BREEDING PART 4:

Due date is close now, some tell tale signs:

Female making a nest

Become less active

Teats are visible

Urine has a strong odour.

Last minute cage clean out was done, you have kept an used blanket for later purposes.

Expected due date is here, what now?

Nothing. Do not disturb the female, keep all strangers, visitors and other animals away from the cage. Just put out water and food. You will hear babies crying, this happens when the mother shifts around, moving babies in a better position. Do not meddle! For the first 2 or 3 days the female won't leave the nest. That is normally a good sign, as she is tending to the babies. Once the female comes out to eat, you may take a quick peek. That is why I recommended in Part 2 that you need to have a nest with a lid on. Do not touch the babies. If there is a dead baby, use a spoon to scoop up the dead baby. If nothing happens, this will be your routine for the first 2 weeks. Just peek.

If you see a baby outside of the nest, scoop it up with a spoon and quietly place it back. If this continues, it means the female kicked out the baby and you need to handraise the baby. Which is not always successful. Females often kill or kick out babies that are weak or have something wrong with the little one. Some females will seek out the weakest baby to kick out to ensure that she has enough milk for the rest of the litter. If she kills the whole litter, you need to keep record of it. Either she got nervous for some reason or she is temperamental (moody) or there was something wrong with the babies. When she has babies the second time and history repeats itself, stop attempting breeding with this female. Period!

After the second week, you might want to clean the cage. Do spot cleaning as far as possible. While cleaning, practise lock up treatment. That is, place something in front of the nest, preventing mom from coming out and running around with babies. For a few hours after cleaning you can continue to keep her locked in her nest. If it was so dirty that you had to clean out the nest, then you use that unwashed blanket to put inside nest. Gently lift babies over onto new bedding. The unwashed blanket still smells familiar to the female and will reduce her stress levels.

You can always cover up the cage with a blanket to keep it dark. This really helps as females feel safe and secure in darkness.

BREEDING PART 5:

From 14 days old you need to take out the babies daily for a short period. As they grow you can increase the time. At week 3 you may properly clean the cage, if you did not use the stowed away blanket, you may use it now.

The female will spend more time away from the babies from week 2 on.

From week 4 ensure that there is 24/7 food available in the cage. Dry food, and at least once a day soft food also. Use the smallest kibble possible in order for babies to chew on it. They are still depending on the mother but will start eating small amounts. From week five the mother will start weaning the babies. Now is the time to use the opportunity to start introducing them to other types of foods also. When away from the mother for bonding, I use the time as well to introduce them to

wet food, scramble eggs etc. Sometimes they will more annoy with the food than actually eating it. This is because every new smell and taste is a first time experience for them, and with annoying with it, it helps them store new smells and flavours in their memory.

You need to spend enough time with the babies to ensure that they are used to human handling. It is easy to spot when hoglets were not handled at all.

And, at 6 weeks of age, you need to ensure that brothers are separated from mother and sisters. Each baby must have their own cage. Males can be sexually active from the age of 7 weeks.

Did you educate the buyer on hedgehogs?

Make sure that you have a care sheet that you can provide the new owner with info.

Please re-consider breeding if you cannot maintain these type of standards.

This is not to encourage breeding, but educating people on how ethical breeders work. Each breeder will have their own criteria / methods / programs etc. There is an abundance (too much) of hedgehogs that is coming from not so ethical breeders, and those poor-bred babies are flooding the market. Leaving little room left for ethical breeders. **Please re-consider before attempting breeding.** I was asked, how can people distinguish between ethical breeders and back yard breeders?

Back Yard Breeders:

- 1) **Has always have babies available on short notice**
- 2) **Keeping multiple hedgehogs in one cage**
- 3) **Always advertising**
- 4) **Always available to take in free females, not willing to pay**
- 5) **No proper record keeping- age of female, info on parents, sometimes can't provide birth of date of babies**
- 6) **Not willing to share photos of setup, does not encourage clients to visit their home, preferring to set up a meeting at a garage or somewhere else.**
- 7) **Does not have a general knowledge of hedgehog care- right food, possible illnesses, can't provide guidance for proper cage setup requirements.**
- 8) **Pretends to be rescue shelter – however does not have any documentation such as adoption forms, vet clearance certifications etc that legal shelters have.**
- 9) **Does not provide new owner with guidance / guides / care sheets**
- 10) **Does not have a take back option**