

## **WHY IT IS CRUEL AND UNETHICAL TO KEEP BLIND OR DISABLED HEDGEHOGS CAPTIVE IN AN ENCLOSED GARDEN**

First of all, blind hedgehogs are just as likely to thrive in the wild as sighted hogs, as they do not rely on their eyesight to navigate, hunt, feed or mate. Given just a week or two with a good rehabilitator a blind hedgehog quickly learns the difference between day and night, as both smell and sound very differently. Those who keep blind hedgehogs in captivity are misguided and ill informed; it is an extremely cruel practice.

A hedgehog with a limb missing lives in constant low grade pain. His spine and pelvis is forced to twist to compensate for the weight not borne by the missing limb, and the stump will be prone to injury. The body on the side of the missing limb will become invaded by parasites and pathogens, eventually resulting in infections as the hedgehog is unable to groom himself. The dead skin accumulating from his inability to scratch that side will provide harbour for scabies, and the ear will become full of mites. If he fell in water he would not be able to swim to safety and would drown, slowly. He would be unable to climb his way out of danger or speedily evade a would-be predator.

And certainly no good ethical vet would agree to amputation - permanently and deliberately disabling a wild animal, then sentencing him to life imprisonment and constant pain, simply to protect one's own sensibilities.

A rescue's number one objective is to prevent suffering; to help and to heal, not to domineer and enslave.

Please be absolutely clear on this: a garden that has no exit is a prison. No matter how big, how well appointed, if a wild animal is not free to leave, then it is a cage, and he is held captive. And to imprison a wild animal, to forcibly deny him the intrinsic essence of his nature - his freedom to be wild - breaks his spirit. He'll live every moment filled with stress and anxiety. Yes, he may survive, as pitiful zoo animals do, but he will not thrive.

You can catch the wind in a jar, but it will no longer be wind.

It is a miserable life - suffering not only physical pain every moment but the stress and anguish of being imprisoned and denied his natural behaviour. To force a wild animal to endure such torture is completely unethical. No good rescue would endorse keeping a wild hedgehog in captivity for any reason.

I have learnt this from many decades of experience, running a hospital exclusively for wild hedgehogs, and providing community outreach. But this truth was already known and is covered by the Animal Welfare Act 2006. The Animal Welfare 'Five Needs' Act particularly applies here to hedgehogs as they are solitary animals.

So to fulfil need number 4; the need to be housed apart from other animals, you are forced to deny him any chance of freely selecting a mate, thus breaching need number 3: the need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns.

One garden, no matter how big, can never fulfil a hedgehog's dietary needs - a wild hedgehog visits around 20 gardens per night, to achieve this. So his diet will have to be permanently supplemented with cat or dog food, thus breaching need number 2; the need for a suitable natural diet, as well as need number 3.

And of course, as mentioned above, keeping a disabled hedgehog prisoner breaches need number 5, the need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease. No good rescue, who understands the nature of wildlife, would endorse keeping a hedgehog in captivity. If a hedgehog cannot be returned to live out his life in the wild, where he belongs, then all would offer the grace of a gentle, pain-free death from euthanasia as the only merciful treatment.