

### **Vanity tagging - the latest exploitation of our wild hedgehogs.**

Sadly there's been a craze lately of small hobbyist rescues tagging hedgehogs before releasing them.

A tag is a piece of plastic tubing printed with the perpetrator's telephone number.

Six to ten of these tags are superglued to the victim's spines.



To be clear: these bits of glued on plastic do NOT collect data, do NOT monitor movements, do NOT report back any information whatsoever. The hedgehogs are never seen again, until they are brought into a good rescue, dying of the stress of being tagged.

The tags serve no purpose, other than a way to stamp ownership on a wild free animal, like a piece of luggage.

'I was here.'

But what's merely an ego boost to the hobbyist, is a potential death sentence to the hedgehog.

Unlike most other mammals, hedgehogs don't have the Flight or Fight reflex. Their only defence is their coat of spines, which they can deploy in an instant, protecting themselves against attack.

This vital defence mechanism is kept in tip-top order; shaken out and groomed regularly, to ensure all spines can lay flat and perfectly aligned, therefore harmless and comfortable when the hedgehog is at rest, and erected when frightened or threatened.

Spines are not just erected when a hedgehog senses danger, they are also criss-crossed, to form an extremely effective formidable barrier.



These plastic tubes super-glued onto the spines impede their smooth instantaneous action, thus preventing this vital defence. So not only does the hedgehog suffer the distress of being handled and held down while plastic tags are superglued to their spines, this stress is never relieved as, even when freed, try as they might these shackles cannot be scratched or groomed off.

Unlike domesticated animals, stress alone can kill a wild animal, in two ways:

1. **Capture Myopathy** is a chain of catastrophic events started by acute fear and stress. The organs fail one by one and eventually acidosis, potassium release from damaged muscles, and heart failure prove fatal.

It can not be reversed and the animal may take a few days to die.

2. **Stress Induced Immune Suppression** is where the immune system is directly disrupted by the endocrine response to stress. Which means any small infection, minor parasite invasion - anything that the average hedgehog normally encounters and shrugs off - will meet no resistance and will overwhelm and kill them.

This can take several weeks of suffering before death occurs.

Hedgehogs being released from a rescue are already challenged, as they are still recuperating not only from the deadly disease which brought them into the rescue, but from the stress of being held captive and being in the proximity of humans for the duration of treatment. Then, at the very point of being released back into the

wild, where they will have to fend for themselves and regain the strength in muscles atrophied from incarceration, to be subjected to the enormous stress of having their one and only form of defence hampered, engenders intolerable fear. This is more than enough to trigger Stress Induced Immune Suppression syndrome.

This fad of vanity tagging hedgehogs came to light when good rescues spoke out about being brought these tagged animals by members of the public and referred by veterinary clinics. All of the victims were in a critical state, extremely ill and distressed and, despite every attempt at resuscitation, all have died. Skin tears and broken spines were found around the tags, indicating frantic attempts by the victims to dislodge them.

Not only are the tagged hedgehogs encumbered by the tags themselves, they are also placed at risk by encouraging handling by members of the public, who see the tags and pick the hedgehog up to read what the tags say. Rescues have reported being phoned by people finding tagged hogs in their garden and capturing them, thinking they have escaped from a research project. Other members of the public have wanted to copy what they see, and super-glue tags onto the hogs visiting their garden, to claim ownership.



Unfortunately rescues in the UK are not regulated. There is no training or qualification required, and no licensing. Quite literally anyone can call themselves a rescue.

And there is no regulatory body, although names can be misleading (organisations set up to fundraise for 'research', such as the British Hedgehog Preservation Society or The Mammal Society are often mistakenly assumed to be some kind of authority, when in fact they don't have any practical knowledge or experience with the animals themselves).

Furthermore vets in the UK are not wildlife trained, as they are a business for domesticated animals and their owners, so lack understanding of the critical differences between domesticated and wild animals, particularly in terms of survival mechanisms employed by wild animals.

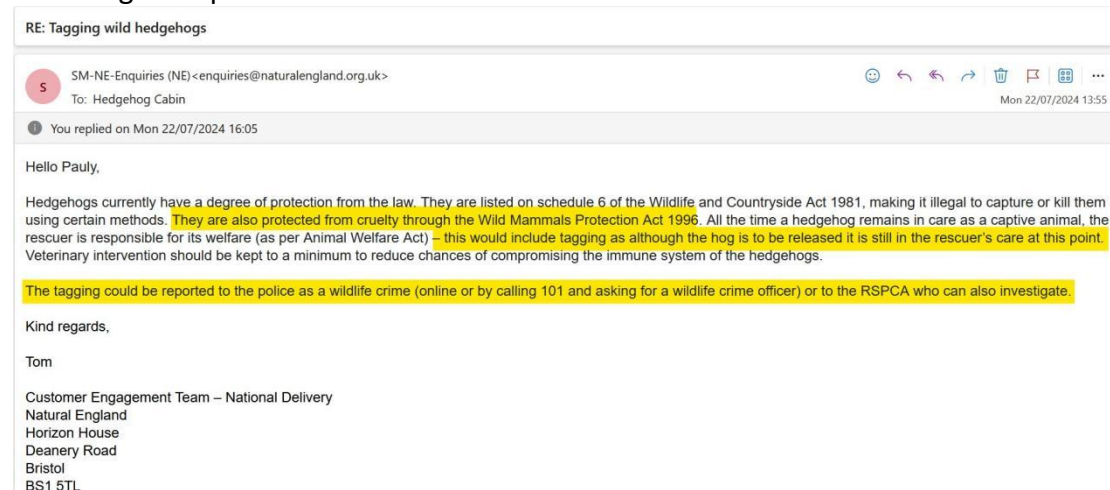


But wildlife welfare organisations and expert front line rescues like Hedgehog Cabin and The Vale Wildlife Hospital, who do have the knowledge and experience, have condemned any type of tagging as unnecessary and unethical. Hedgehogs are handed in to rescues by the public in good faith that they will be treated and protected from harm. They are not property to be tagged and owned.

There is no law that specifically prevents tagging hedgehogs, just as there's no law that specifically prevents docking the tails of hedgehogs or forcing them to wear hats. There hasn't been the need for such specific laws, as the Acts that prevent cruelty to wild animals are sufficient.

It's well recognised that applying a tag adversely affects a wild animal's welfare, which is why the licensing laws were introduced; to restrict it to formal research by a recognised body, and prevent just anyone grabbing a wild animal and sticking a tag with their name or phone number on.

However, the perpetrators of this vanity tagging have attempted to validate their actions by disputing these facts, demanding Natural England issue a statement reversing their previous written advice:



These perpetrators have badgered Natural England, demanding their freedom to tag, quoting a Section 18 Subsection 8(c) of The Animal Welfare Act 2006 and insisting it applies to hedgehogs being released from rescues.

As can be seen, this section relates to **animals in distress that have been seized and taken into care for their own safety by police officers or RSPCA inspectors**, such as dogs confiscated at a dog fighting raid, or animals removed from a pet hoarder's house.

The tags are specifically for identifying each individual animal being removed from danger and **entering** the place of safety.  
It has zero relevance to wild hedgehogs being **released** back into the wild by rescues.

## Animal Welfare Act 2006

Acts > 2006 c. 45 > Animals in distress > Section 18

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27/03/2007

06/04/2007

**Changes to legislation:**  
There are currently no known outstanding effects for the Animal Welfare Act 2006, Section 18.

18

**Powers in relation to animals in distress**

- (1) If an inspector or a constable reasonably believes that a protected animal is suffering, he may take such steps as appear to him to be immediately necessary to alleviate the animal's suffering.
- (2) Subsection (1) does not authorise destruction of an animal.
- (3) If a veterinary surgeon certifies that the condition of a protected animal is such that it should be destroyed, an inspector or a constable may—
  - (a) destroy the animal where it is or take it to another place and destroy it there, or
  - (b) arrange for the doing of any of the things mentioned in paragraph (a).
- (4) An inspector or a constable may act under subsection (3) without the certificate of a veterinary surgeon if—
  - (a) that the condition of the animal is such that there is no reasonable alternative to destroying it,
  - (b) that the need for action is such that it is not reasonably practicable to wait for a veterinary surgeon to arrive.
- (5) An inspector or a constable may take a protected animal into possession if a veterinary surgeon certifies that—
  - (a) that it is suffering, or
  - (b) that it is likely to suffer if its circumstances do not change.
- (6) An inspector or a constable may act under subsection (5) without the certificate of a veterinary surgeon if—
  - (a) that the animal is suffering or that it is likely to do so if its circumstances do not change, or
  - (b) that the need for action is such that it is not reasonably practicable to wait for a veterinary surgeon to arrive.
- (7) The power conferred by subsection (5) includes power to take into possession dependent offspring and to take them into possession under that subsection.
- (8) Where an animal is taken into possession under subsection (5), an inspector or a constable may—
  - (a) remove it, or arrange for it to be removed, to a place of safety;
  - (b) care for it, or arrange for it to be cared for—
    - (i) on the premises where it was being kept when it was taken into possession, or
    - (ii) at such other place as he thinks fit;
  - (c) mark it, or arrange for it to be marked, for identification purposes.

Bizarrely, Natural England complied, issuing a statement in direct conflict with their previous, long-standing interpretation.

Their decision makes no sense at all and has been catastrophic; giving rise to hedgehogs being stressed to death by these vanity taggers, and members of the

public handling these endangered Red Listed wild animals, effectively removing any protection they previously enjoyed.

Natural England's recent decision, quoting this irrelevant section as a reason for reversing the interpretation of this Act, which has been in force for 19 years, appears on their website:

<https://naturalengland.blog.gov.uk/2024/08/08/clarifying-the-facts-tagging-of-hedgehogs-and-licensing-requirements/>

This decision needs challenging legally and a definitive statement made, making it abundantly clear that tagging a hedgehog by any means can only be carried out under licence.

Many rescues and animal welfare organisations, including PETA - the largest of its kind in the world - are vehemently against tagging hedgehogs.



**ANIMALS ARE NOT OURS**  
to experiment on, eat, wear, use for  
entertainment or abuse in any other way.

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## Why Vanity Tagging Is Harming Hedgehogs



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Posted by **PETA UK** on December 19, 2024 | [Permalink](#)



If you see a hedgehog who has been tagged, contact your local wildlife rescue and or [Hedgehog Cabin](#).

### Hedgehog Tagging is Vanity, Not Conservation

Tags result from well-meaning hobbyist "rescuers" letting others know they have interacted with the animal, but they serve no good purpose. The plastic does NOT collect data, monitor movements, or help in any way.

Putting your stamp of ownership on a wild animal, as if they were a piece of luggage, is cruel and dangerous.

Full article: <https://www.peta.org.uk/blog/tagged-hedgehog/>