

Hedgehog warning for gardeners

People in Edinburgh and the Lothians have been warned to look out for hedgehogs while gardening after a surge in injuries caused by garden tools such as strimmers.

The Scottish SPCA's dedicated small mammal team is currently looking after 14 hedgehogs at its National Wildlife Centre in Fishcross, Clackmannanshire.

But they warned the number "is growing every day" as people take advantage of the warm weather to take on garden tasks.

Jenna Lister, triage assistant at the charity's National Wildlife Centre, said: "With the arrival of warmer weather, we often see an increase in injured hedgehogs being brought into the centre – many of them hurt during gardening activities.

"Strimmer injuries can be devastating, ranging from infected wounds to broken or missing limbs, and in some cases, can be fatal."

The West European hedgehog (*Erinaceus europaeus*) has suffered a 30% population decline of in the past decade.

Last year, its conservation status was raised from Least Concern to Near Threatened on the IUCN Red List, meaning it has moved one step closer to extinction.

Key factors driving the decline of Britain's only spiny mammal include habitat fragmentation from urbanisation and

agricultural expansion, vehicle collisions, pesticide use and garden mismanagement.

The Scottish SPCA cared for 89 hedgehogs in the first quarter of 2024, with 59 of the prickly mammals already finding refuge with the charity so far this year.

The charity frequently admits hedgehogs found out during the day in poor condition, which is usually a sign they're unwell and in urgent need of specialist care and encourages people to employing wildlife-friendly garden management practices.

These include leaving natural materials like leaves, logs and moss, which make ideal nesting spots for hedgehogs; removing hazards such as netting and plastic and creating safe spaces for the animals to explore.

Gardeners are urged to check carefully before strimming, digging, or doing other work as hedgehogs often hide in undergrowth or leaf piles, and support the creatures by putting out shallow dishes of water and offering cat food or specially formulated hedgehog food – but never bread or milk.

Anyone who comes across a nest should check for signs of injury but avoid disturbing it and gently cover it back up if all seems well.

Anyone who finds a hedgehog showing signs of distress – such as lying on its side, wobbling, limping, or walking in circles, trapped in netting, drains, or holes – or showing visible injuries should call a wildlife rescue centre or the Scottish SPCA's animal helpline 03000 999 999.



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