



Hedgehogs

This year, the Society for the Study and Conservation of Mammals, the publisher of this journal, proclaimed the western hedgehog (*Erinaceus europaeus*) as the Mammal of the Year. At the same time, the German *Schutzgemeinschaft Deutsches Wild* and the City of Antwerp did the same thing. Thus, in several neighbouring territories, 2009 has been the Year of the Hedgehog. The hedgehog can be seen as a flagship species which attracts the attention of the general public. People often see hedgehogs in their own surroundings, especially in their gardens.

Lutra has taken the Year of the Hedgehog into account by publishing two articles on this animal in this volume. In the current issue Anouschka Hof and Paul Bright report on hedgehogs in cities. And, in the first issue of this year Toni Bunnell (Lutra 52 (1): 15-22) writes about the differences in the growth rates of young in early and late litters and between the sexes.

The study of Hof and Bright is particularly relevant for the Year of the Hedgehog. It shows that the presence of wildlife-friendly features, such as hedgehog nest-boxes and feeders attracts hedgehogs to gardens. Equally, the lack of connectivity between patches of suitable habitat caused by barriers, such as impenetrable fences, restricts hedgehog abundance. The local hedgehog population will increase if people put out the right food, provide them

with shelter and allow them into their gardens by making gaps in the fence. Typically, the field data for this study were collected by volunteers, people with a love of mammals, who took part in a survey ('Living with Mammals') organised by the Mammals Trust UK.

Although the hedgehog is a well-known animal, there is not sufficient information on population trends. The 2006 national Red List of Mammals of the Netherlands (Thissen et al. 2009: Lutra 52 (1): 23-35) has listed the hedgehog as 'Data Deficient'. The Society for the Study and Conservation of Mammals suspects that the numbers have gone down since 1950, the year of reference for the Dutch Red Lists, but it has no idea of the size of the decline, whether it is around 20% or even over 50%. As in other West European countries, it seems that the hedgehog is not faring well. As a result of evidence of a significant decline in Great Britain, the hedgehog has recently been included in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan.

Lutra has a tradition of publishing articles about hedgehogs. The first issue of volume 42 was a hedgehog 'special'. Marcel Huijser was the main contributor, with three papers. In a review he concluded that the strong increase of density of the road network and the intensity of traffic was having a serious effect on hedgehog populations (Huijser 1999: Lutra 42 (1): 39-56). In another paper, jointly written with Nigel Reeve, he argued that high levels



Young hedgehog. *Photograph: Rollin Verlinde/Vilda.*

of hedgehog mortality could be traced back to a combination of anthropogenic factors (Reeve & Huijser 1999: Lutra 42 (1): 7-24). A third paper in this volume presented results of surveys carried out between 1995 and 1997 in which volunteers counted hedgehog traffic victims (Huijser et al. 1999: Lutra 42 (1): 57-58). As part of the Year of the Hedgehog, the Society for the Study and Conservation of Mammals has organised a similar count in 2009. While the data has not yet been analysed it is hoped that it can be meaningfully compared with the results obtained in the 1990s and provide insights into how hedgehogs are now being affected by road traffic. Following on from Reeve and Huijser, Toni Bunnell (2001, Lutra 44 (1): 3-14) also showed that anthropogenic factors contribute substantially to the incidence of injury and mortality of hedgehogs in all age groups and emphasised the need for measures to maintain hedgehog populations.

More recently, in 2006, Lutra published another article about hedgehogs, by the British environmental writer Hugh Warwick (2006: Lutra 49 (2): 89-102). This article precipitated a chain of events that resulted in the saving of the lives of hedgehogs from Uist in the Western Isles of Scotland. Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) was culling hedgehogs on the island, as they considered them to be a threat to breeding birds. SNH claimed that it was pointless to transport the hedgehogs alive to the mainland, as relocated hedgehogs would not survive. Warwick showed that hedgehogs from Uist did thrive after translocation and SNH stopped the culling and started to release the hedgehogs caught on Uist elsewhere. In the first six months after its publication the article was downloaded about 2,000 times.

Warwick has since written the inspiring book 'A Prickly Affair'. The American edition of this book is entitled 'The Hedgehog's Dilemma'. This title is derived from a parable of the philosopher Schopenhauer, contained in his book 'Parerga und Paralipomena' (1851). In this parable, a group of hedgehogs decide to huddle together to share warmth during a spell of cold weather, but they find they start hurting each other with their sharp spines and ultimately have to sacrifice warmth for comfort. The moral that Schopenhauer is seeking to convey is that people cannot become emotionally close to one another without causing significant psychological harm. He argues that one should cultivate internal warmth in order to stay at a safe distance from the dangers of close personal relationships. Warwick describes how the hedgehogs overcome the obvious obstacle to reproduction and skilfully extends the idea to explore the current state of human-animal interactions. The dilemma we face is trying to get close enough to the wild without corrupting it out of existence.

Warwick's book argues that the hedgehog offers a unique insight into how humans can

protect nature, since it is probably the only wild animal city people have a chance of getting really close to, even in a ‘nose-to-nose experience’. As part of the Year of the Hedgehog, Warwick came over to the Netherlands from the UK and held a lecture on his philosophy about hedgehogs captivating his audience with his slogan ‘save the hedgehog, save the world’.

Meanwhile we are happy to announce that Bastiaan Meerburg has joined the editorial board. Bastiaan completed his PhD on the ‘Zoonotic Risks of Rodents in Livestock Production’ at Wageningen University. He has been a member of the editorial board of the journal *Zoogdier*,

also published by the Society for the Study and Conservation of Mammals, so he is already familiar with the tasks ahead. Lutra looks forward to benefiting from Bastiaan’s linguistic skills and scientific knowledge.

Schopenhauer, A. 1851. *Parerga und Paralipomena*. Kleine philosophische Schriften. A.W. Hayn, Berlin, Germany.

Warwick, H. 2008. *A Prickly Affair: My Life with Hedgehogs*. Penguin, London, UK.

Warwick, H. 2008. *The Hedgehog’s Dilemma: A tale of obsession, nostalgia, and the world’s most charming mammal*. Bloomsbury, New York, USA.



A prickly affair: the spines of a hedgehog. *Photograph: Jasja Dekker.*



The winning photo of the Year of the Hedgehog photo contest 2009. *Photograph: Peter Zeeman.*