Introduction

Hedges are more than just lines of shrubs. They usually have some sort of herbaceous growth at or near the base and many contain emergent trees. They may be set on banks and can have ditches along one or both sides. The best hedges have wide margins, often referred to as buffer strips or headlands, which are managed differently from the arable or grass crop. These five different components: mature/emergent trees, shrub layer, base/bank, ditch and margins, all need to be thought about when deciding how to manage a hedge.

A Good Hedge for Hedgehogs

A good hedge for hedgehogs (*Erinaceus europeus*) is one that has a thick base, a wide field margin, linking habitats in the landscape.

Field margins are where hedgehogs forage for ground-dwelling invertebrates. A wide field margin with many different plants and good vegetation structure helps to create the many different micro-habitats favoured by invertebrates. Hedgehogs do prefer rough grassland.

Hedgehogs make use of a thick hedge base with tussocky vegetation and plenty of twiggy material and leaves. This will create suitable habitat for daytime shelter and winter hibernation sites. They also build their nests under the dense low cover provided by bramble outgrowths.

A good hedge ditch needs to provide moist areas throughout the year. Such ditches should have shallow sloping sides rather than steep or vertical sides, to allow easy access for hedgehogs. The margins of ditches provide wetter conditions favoured by slugs and snails that are the preferred diet of older hedgehogs.

A hedge that has no gaps and is connected with other hedges or patches of scrub, woodland or rough ground will allow hedgehogs to move freely through the landscape. They avoid wide open ground, as this leaves them more open to predation.

Hedge Components used by Hedgehogs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mature/Emergent Trees</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shrub Layer</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bank/Base</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ditch</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Margin</td>
<td>✓</td>
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</tbody>
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Key Management Tips

- Keep hedges thick by cutting them, but only once every three years and no more than one third of hedges on the farm in any one year, safety and access considerations excepting.

- Avoid heavy grazing, to encourage hedge base growth.

- Rejuvenate hedges when they become gappy at the base, to keep them healthy, by laying rather than coppicing.

- Encourage outgrowths of bramble or field rose clumps, as they provide excellent nesting places and are a good food source. Clumps need not be very big, a metre or so wide is sufficient.

- Manage ditches so they don’t develop steep sides which may then trap hedgehogs.

- Join up missing links in the landscape by planting new native species-rich hedges.

- Minimise use of pesticides in the vicinity of field margins and crop headlands, as this is where hedgehogs forage for invertebrates on which to feed.

- Provide escape ramps at cattle grids on farms, as they can be lethal to hedgehogs.

Ecology of the Hedgehog

The hedgehog is one of the most familiar British mammals. It is a solitary nocturnal ground-dweller that eats a wide variety of invertebrates, such as earthworms, beetles, caterpillars, slugs and snails, carrion and chicks. They are protected by spines and have the ability to curl into a tight ball to repel predators, but they regularly fall prey to badgers. Hedgehog numbers are known to be inversely related to badger densities. Hedgehogs mainly inhabit woodland edge, rough grassland and hedge habitat. They live above ground and build their sleeping, breeding and hibernation nests in the dense cover provided by twigs, leaves and other debris. Evidence points to hedgehogs being less abundant where the landscape matrix contains fewer hedges and larger fields and research has shown that hedgehogs rarely venture far into arable fields. They can range between 2-4km at night hunting for food.

Hedgehogs can be found almost everywhere in the British Isles, except some of the Scottish Islands.

Hedgehogs are protected under Section 6 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and by the Wild Mammals Protection Act 1996. They are recognised as Species of Principal Importance for the Conservation of Biodiversity under Section 41 (England) and Section 42 (Wales) of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act (2006), the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 and the Wildlife and Natural Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

Further information

British Hedgehog Society www.hedgehogs.org.uk/ www/preservation/society/
Wildlife Trusts Factsheet: www.wildlifetrust.org.uk/facts/hedge.htm