

## Confined to the Garden: Week 3

Week three of coronavirus lockdown... Still confined to the garden but the sun is shining again and there's been plenty of nocturnal action caught on camera too.

After reading last week, of course, you're desperate to find out whether the Hedgehogs liked the new feeding station I built for them. There haven't been any complaints, in fact they don't really seem to have noticed my efforts at all. They know where to find the food, and as long as it keeps coming, they'll keep eating! You can see from the pictures below that the new feeding station is just as popular as the old one.



Click here to see a video of the very first Hedgehog to visit the new feeding station:

<https://youtu.be/BUXoH58bjh0>

For advice on how to encourage Hedgehogs in your own garden and lots of other Hedgehog stuff, visit the Hedgehog Street website: <https://www.hedgehogstreet.org/help-hedgehogs/>

Hedgehogs are not the only visitors to my garden though. A few local Foxes stop by every now and then. I don't usually put food out for them, but they sometimes find the odd scrap, or just have a drink from the pond.



Fox drinking from pond

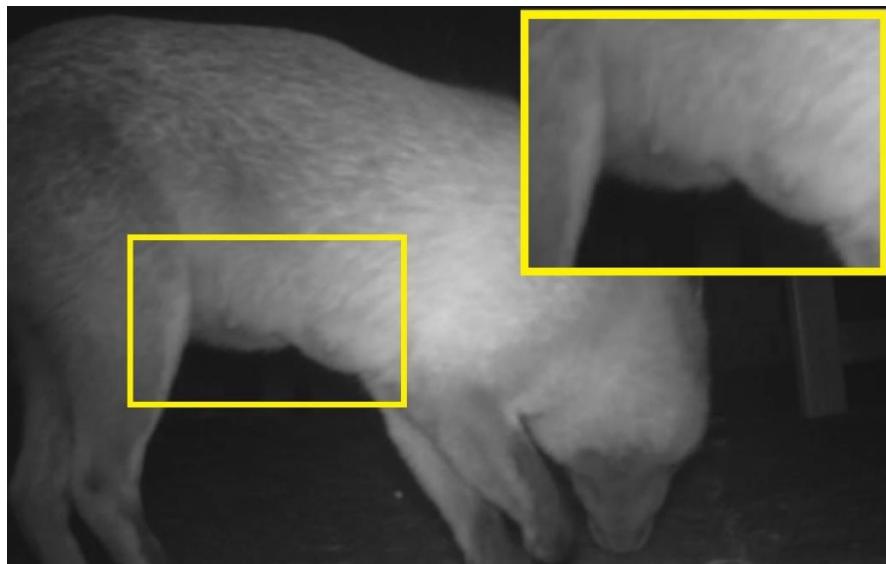
Most of the Foxes have some sort of distinguishing mark which allows me to tell them apart, but the most easily recognisable is a vixen I like to call '3Paws'.



To see a video of 3Paws visiting the garden last year, click here:

<https://youtu.be/bZL3MeWzN54>

I hope it's clear from the pictures why I call her 3Paws. Despite lacking a front foot, she always looks healthy and this week I spotted this...



This looks to me like she could be feeding cubs. If she is, she would have them safely hidden away in an earth somewhere and they probably won't emerge until around mid-April. They will stay close to the den for a few weeks and gradually start to explore further afield. They will abandon the den by July, when they will follow their parents around the territory learning all the best places to look for food. When they do venture out, I hope 3Paws brings them to my garden and I get to see them playing.

Although she seems to be lactating, she may not necessarily have cubs of her own. Foxes are known to display 'allopelvic behaviour': raising, or helping to raise, offspring that are not their own. Subordinate vixens (usually offspring from a previous year) have been known to suckle a dominant vixen's cubs, however this doesn't usually start until the cubs are above ground.

For a more in-depth exploration of allopelvic behaviour in Foxes, click here:  
<https://www.wildlifeonline.me.uk/animals/article/red-fox-behaviour-helpers-in-fox-society>

Watching the Foxes and Hedgehogs interact can be fascinating. Sometimes the Foxes are interested in the Hedgehogs, but a prickle to the nose soon puts them off. Some are more persistent than others. Some of them completely ignore the hogs, and some actually seem to be wary of them (they've probably discovered their prickly nature before).





For a video of 3Paws harassing a Hedgehog in my garden, click here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x7z8gVYiLZg>

Adult Hedgehogs are well protected by their 5-7000 spines. Unlike Badgers, Foxes are not strong enough to open a Hedgehog up once it has rolled into a ball. The band of muscle that the hog uses to curl up is very strong. Foxes are very clever though, and there is anecdotal evidence of Foxes finding ways to predate Hedgehogs. Some have been observed grabbing a back leg, so the hog can't roll up properly to protect itself; or rolling the hog into water so it must uncurl to swim. So far, I haven't seen any of this sort of behaviour. It seems to be something that a Fox has to learn, so is more common in some areas than others. Some Wildlife rescues frequently see leg injuries where a Fox or other predator has tried and failed to catch the hedgehog. Urban Foxes' stomach contents have been found to include Hedgehog remains, but this is probably because they eat roadkill. In general, it is quite possible for Foxes and Hedgehogs to live alongside each other in our gardens.

For a very interesting article on Hedgehog predation, click here:

<https://www.wildlifeonline.me.uk/questions/answer/how-significant-are-foxes-and-badgers-as-predators-of-hedgehogs>

Hopefully, harmony will prevail in this garden, and both Foxes and Hedgehogs will continue to visit and provide me with entertainment and education I can share with you. Check back here next week to see what has been happening in my garden.

There are more videos from 'Hogcam' available on YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCg7gSnXpjeo85XqoY35hTwg/videos>