

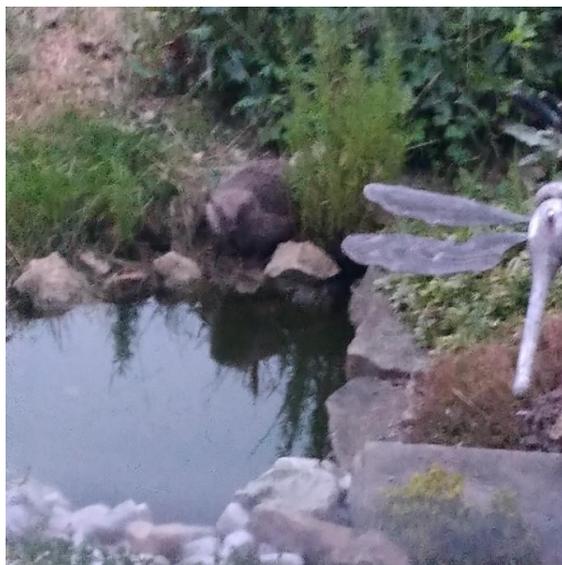
Confined to the Garden – Week 7

Another bank holiday weekend in lockdown approaches. I was supposed to be camping with my friends this weekend. I'm sure I'm not the only one who had plans, but I'm still a little bitter about it. However, I must not forget how fortunate I am to have this little garden. Not everyone gets to enjoy Hedgehogs in their garden these days. Britain's Hedgehog population has declined by half in the last two decades, with less than a million now remaining in the UK. This week, It's Hedgehog awareness week, so it's all about the Hedgehogs! To be fair, every week is Hedgehog awareness week in my garden, but this provides the perfect excuse to ramble on about nothing but Hedgehogs for a while.

Click the link below for more details and lots of tips on how to help Hedgehogs:

<https://www.hedgehogstreet.org/hog-awareness-week/>

I have been feeding Hedgehogs in my garden since 2018. I don't know exactly how many individuals visit the feeding station, but it's not unusual to see four or five of them at once on a busy night. Last year, one hog developed a habit of coming out earlier and earlier and visiting the feeding station before others had a chance. Sometimes hours before proper darkness descended. A risky strategy but I suppose the early hog catches the worm, or in this case the cat food. I often had to go out and top up the bowls afterwards as there wasn't much left for the sensible nocturnal hogs!



Hedgehog out before dark (taken on a phone)

To see a video of this daylight hoggery, click the link below:

<https://youtu.be/3AsLLkUdlcc>

Although it provides great opportunities for colour images of these fantastic little beasts, daylight is not where they should be. Hedgehogs are entirely nocturnal. Usually, being out in daylight is a sign that something is wrong. There are, however, exceptions to this rule. Pregnant females will go out gathering nesting materials just before giving birth; new mothers will sometimes take a break from the nest to get food and water while their young sleep; in summer, when the nights are short, a hungry Hedgehog may go out foraging around dusk and dawn. However, these Hedgehogs would be moving quickly, with purpose, as the one in my video is doing. If a hog out in daylight appears lethargic or drunk, there is definitely a problem. With populations declining so fast, they need all the help they can get, so if you find an unwell Hedgehog please do stop and help.

Click here for good advice on when and how to rescue a hog in need:

<http://www.hedgehog-rescue.org.uk/leavealone.php>

I have set Hogcam III up in front of one of the hog shelters as I saw signs of activity there. There have been some comings and goings, but no sign of nesting yet. It did capture an intrepid hog climbing on the logs next to the shelter, which was pretty cute.



To see a short video of this, click the link below:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xPXfIK0Eto>

What I'm hoping to see is evidence of a nest being constructed, which might mean hoglets. I would love to see baby Hedgehogs in my garden! I did get a bit of footage in June last year that looked like nesting materials were being gathered for the other shelter, but it wasn't very clear.

To see this clip, click here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Iaga8A_okQ

Later that morning, the Hedgehog left the box during daylight hours, which may suggest she was taking a break from her little ones.

To see a clip of this, click here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K03fK4sf-6s>

As much as I want to see those cute hoglets, I would never dream of opening the box to check, as disturbing a mother with babies can cause her to abandon or even eat them. This may sound harsh, but she has invested a lot in producing offspring. If a predator finds the nest she cannot protect them and it makes more sense for her to regain some of that energy than to let the predator have it all. Hoglets are born with spines but these are covered by a layer of skin to protect the mother. The spines start to emerge within hours of birth. They are soft and pliable to start with and harden up over 3-4 weeks. Once their spines are fully developed, they can follow their mother on foraging trips. After around ten days of foraging with mother, the young will wander off on their own and become independent. I was lucky enough to see one young Hedgehog last year. He followed his mum to the feeding station where they encountered an adult male. The male was interested in courting the female but showed very little interest in the young hog despite him getting in the way of the courtship dance. The female did not reject the male's advances and didn't really seem to notice when her offspring eventually wandered off exploring and climbed on top of the feeding station. Unfortunately, the camera trap didn't record how he managed to get down.



To see edited highlights of this young hog's adventures, click the link below:

<https://youtu.be/DP6Yd2b4EtY>

To see the longer 'uncut' version of this adventure, click here:

<https://youtu.be/2bkLIPit-ul>

With a bit of luck, another mother will choose to nest here this year and I will get to see more hoglets following her around for a few days. Although I have seen plenty of courtship behaviour, hoglets aren't usually born until June or July, so for now I will just keep an eye (or a camera) on those shelters and keep my fingers crossed. This month (May) is officially the start of the 'rut' for Hedgehogs, but the males round here have been headbutting each other and circling the females for weeks already, so maybe they're ahead of schedule this year.

Click here to see a very short clip of some enthusiastic hog-dancing from May last year:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H5EdUo7xhYk>

As its Hedgehog awareness week, I'd like to share one of my favourite clips from last year. Although I put out food for the Hedgehogs, it's always nice to see them foraging for natural food. The hog in this clip has found a slug under the water bowl and is having some trouble getting at it. It takes determination, but the slug gets eaten in the end. It took a while, so some of the footage has been speeded up.



Click the link below to see this video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F-pKl5XiA-4>

Check back here next week to see how the Hedgehogs are getting on, get a progress update on my projects for pollinators and find out what else is happening in my garden.