

Tales from the Prickle

Not all Hedgehog stories have a happy ending but this is a wonderful tale...

Little Leon was found one November day by a French lady, she was driving along and saw a dead hedgehog on the road, next to the body was a tiny little one who just stood there waiting for mum to move. She stopped the car and picked it up, checked the area to make sure there were no others and took it straight to the vet, who sent her to me.

Leon weighed just 70g, he was either being moved to another nest or out on one of his first forages with his mother. He was not injured but cold, scared and hungry. Because of his age, about 2 – 3 weeks old, I gave him puppy milk formula milk mixed with a little Hills A/D from a syringe every three hours during the day and made sure he had a warm heat pad and fleece to snuggle into. Very quickly he learnt to feed for himself and started to gain weight. Luckily he didn't have any setbacks like intestinal worms or coccidiosis which is so common with autumn babies.

Because of the time of year he had to be kept in a warm environment to prevent him from going into hibernation. A young hedgehog that is not up to sufficient weight will die in hibernation. So he joined the rest of the juveniles in my spare bedroom feasting eventually on non-fish cat pate, mashed banana, small kitten croquettes and a few dried mealworms until he gained enough weight to go into the barn and hibernate in a safe place until spring.

In February Leon weighed 650g and I moved him into a larger cage with a cosy insulated box filled with straw, shredded newspaper, dry leaves and small pieces of fleece. I continued to give food and water daily until he finally decided to go to sleep; I then supplied him with a daily dish of dry croquettes and fresh water. Hedgehogs wake up periodically to feed which can be quite frequent if the weather is mild. Some don't hibernate at all if the temperature is warm which is why wild hedgehogs suffer in mild winters as there is none of their natural food available to eat and they have no choice but to eat slugs and snails if they can find them which in turn can give them lung worm. A dish of non-fish cat croquettes in a covered feeding station and a shallow bowl of fresh water are always welcome at this time of year.

Once spring started to arrive and the wild hedgehogs were out and about, Leon and the others woke up and became more active. I moved them into a run in the garden to get them used to the scents and noises of the outdoors. By the end of April I released them, Leon weighed a whopping 1.2kg. They now had a whole summer in which to learn how to become proficient survivors. The males and females became old enough to breed in the autumn and produce the next generation. It's a wonderful feeling to know that you had a part to play in increasing the hedgehog population.

Written by Simone Bryant – Phoenix Wildlife Adviser