Hedgehog Recovery Plan and Statement of Support

The HogWatch Scotland project has been running since 2019, funded by the British Hedgehog Preservation Society and aims to survey and protect hedgehogs across Scotland. There are concerning population declines across the UK. Between 2000-14 hedgehog populations declined by over half in our countryside and nearly a third in cities and suburbs. There are around 310,000 hedgehogs left in Scotland and around 1.5 million across England, Scotland and Wales collectively. Although population estimates can be challenging throughout the 1960's there were over 30 million hedgehogs across Britain. Further information in The State of Britain's Hedgehogs 2018.

Our proposal until 2023 is to work more with communities on a landscape scale to develop more connected landscape and implement conservation changes to enhance habitat for hedgehogs. We therefore fully support the actions of the West Stormont Woodland Group to restructure and renaturalise the conifer dominant woodlands. We also support West Stormont Connect, the landscape scale vision implemented through projects such as Ridge to River and Biodiversity Villages.

There are three main habitat requirements to consider when managing green space for hedgehogs:

► A range of nesting opportunities

The most sturdy nests rely on **medium-sized deciduous leaves** and a structure to hold the leaves in place. Bramble patches, log piles and open compost heaps are common locations for breeding nests and hibernacula.

Actions:

- Alongside natural regeneration, the most beneficial species (medium-sized deciduous) would be oak, sycamore, fruit trees, beech. Birch leaves are not the hibernation leaf of choice due to their small size. A focus on bringing the stands of diversification species for restocking and enrichment such as – oak, hazel, rowan, birch, holly, hawthorn and gean into good health and providing nesting opportunity in this area.
- Identifying opportunity for scrub, bramble, shrubs and dead hedging which are important nesting and foraging sites.
- Keeping fallen leaves on the ground or in accessible leaf stores is especially useful for breeding and winter nest building. Either keeping leaf litter in situ or collecting into piles near tree lines, copses or hedgerows.
- Bramble and scrub cover provide protection from predators. Establish and maintain bramble cover year-round – this will keep lower daytime temperature during hibernation and reduce arousal from the hibernation period.
- Badgers are the main natural predator of hedgehogs and also compete for similar prey. It's thought that the two species can coexist as they have for thousands of years, so long as there's enough feeding and nesting habitat for them both.

- Whilst not advised as a replacement for natural habitat, purpose-built hedgehog houses throughout sheltered areas of woodland can provide additional protection from predators.

► High quality feeding areas

Hedgehogs are omnivores, but the bulk of their diet consists of macro-invertebrates such as beetles, worms, slugs, earwigs, caterpillars and millipedes.

Actions:

- Deadwood management in woodlands. Creating smaller piles of decaying wood and leaf litter and allowing larger fallen pieces of deadwood to integrate with the landscape providing essential habitat for beetle species, earthworms and a variety of other invertebrates. 40% of woodland wildlife depends on deadwood at some life stage.
- Pesticide and herbicide use: TCV support West Stormont Woodland Group aspirations to be pesticide free. Herbicides can directly reduce earthworm density and reduce the varied ground cover needed for foraging. Slug pellets are potentially lethal if directly ingested and also reduce important prey sources. Avoid chemicals where possible and use organic alternatives where necessary. Wool pellets, nematode treatments, salt, seaweed, broken egg -shells or coffee grounds are popular alternatives for slug control. WSWG lay out that they will not be using any biocides in the management of the land.

► Ensuring varied habitats are well-connected

Hedgehogs are highly active and range widely. They need to be able to move freely through a well-connected range of habitats to find food, mates and areas to nest. Radio-tracking studies show that hedgehogs can travel around 2km in a night in urban areas, and up to 3km a night in rural landscapes, though distances differ between the sexes. A viable population of urban hedgehogs is thought to need **around 0.9km^2** of well-connected habitat.

Actions:

- In surrounding housing, fields and land ensure boundaries are permeable to hedgehogs. Hedging or hedgehog-sized holes in fencing or walls helps to create Hedgehog Highways. Ground-level boundary holes should measure 13x13cm and should link as many neighbouring pieces of land as possible through inhabited areas, forming a connected section between the woodlands.
- Edge habitat is especially important as hedgehogs often navigate landscapes by following linear features. New boundary planting along edges of the woodland with a native hedgerow mix (species including: blackthorn, hawthorn, goat willow, dog rose etc…) or to connect any gaps in existing hedgerow is recommended. This could also be enhanced with hedgehog-friendly hedgerow corridors within the woodland to connect various areas.
- Increase density per hectare, the width, height and length of hedgerows. Ideally hedge bases should be more than 2m wide, with dense vegetation and no gaps

For more information see here - https://www.hedgehogstreet.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Farmers-leaflet.pdf