



**Hedgehog Ambassador
Volunteer Information Booklet**



We are the charity caring for your
parks, woodlands and lakes forever

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Volunteer Ambassador Role & Key Messages

- To promote The Parks Trust
- To lead engaging and passionate talks about hedgehog conservation.
- Provide information on hedgehog ecology, promoting understanding of their preferred habitat, diet and behaviour.
- Raise awareness and understanding of threats to hedgehogs nationally and locally in Milton Keynes.
- Encourage school and community groups to take part in MKHogwatch.
- Provide information on what individuals can do at home in their gardens or on school/community centre grounds to help hedgehogs locally.
- Provide information on national hedgehog conservation schemes, e.g. hedgehog street, and encourage individuals to become Hedgehog Champions.
- Provide training for groups on how to survey for hedgehogs in their local area, and transport survey equipment to schools/community groups as required.
- Hand out leaflets, education resources and information on The Parks Trust.
- To present certificates to schools and community groups that have taken part in MKHogwatch.

Information

The Parks Trust

The Parks Trust:

- Was created in 1992
- Is an independent **charity** that cares for many of Milton Keynes parks and green spaces
- Owns and maintains **6,000** acres of river valleys, woodlands, lakesides, parks, Farmland and 80 miles of landscaped areas alongside the main roads. Approx. **25%** of the new city area
- Spend £6m each year to care for the parks and landscapes in Milton Keynes
- Is **not** funded by your Council Tax
- Is funded from property and an investment portfolio which was endowed to the trust by The Milton Keynes Development Corporation
- Organises:
 - over **450 events** and activities in the parks each year
 - provides environmental education programmes for over **5,000 people**
 - is supported by over **200 volunteers** from the local community

Our vision:

"We create beautiful and inspirational parks, lakes and landscapes that will be loved by the people of Milton Keynes, forever."

- On average, we plant around 40,000 new trees and shrubs each year to replace plants dying out or those affected by utility works and landscape re-modelling.
- Since 1992 we will have planted one million new trees and shrubs and in the last nine years we have planted over 400,000 bulbs.
- We continually improve our parks by providing new facilities, increasing biodiversity and enhancing habitats.
- The Parks Trust owns many wildflower meadows and is creating and restoring even more – currently it has over 135 hectares of wildflower-rich meadow land, the equivalent of around 193 football pitches.

- Over 130 ponds are flourishing in The Parks Trust's care and are important habitats for dragonflies and other wildlife, including the great crested newt, a protected species.
- To bring more green spaces under our stewardship for residents to enjoy forever we work with developers, Milton Keynes Development Partnership and Milton Keynes Council.
- The Parks Trust is governed by a Board of 17 Trustees who are also Directors of the company.
- The Trust employs around 70 staff led by the Chief Executive, David Foster.



The State of Hedgehogs Nationally

- Although still relatively common and widespread, there is evidence of a dramatic decline in recent years, with **around a third of the national population lost since 2000.**
- Hedgehogs are disappearing from our countryside as quickly as tigers are worldwide.
- Estimated there are fewer than 1 million hedgehogs left in the UK.
- Declining in both rural and urban habitats, due to a range of factors.
- The hedgehog is legally protected from trapping or intentional harm

Hedgehog Ecology & Behaviour

- Hedgehogs are 22-28cm long, covered on back and flanks by around 6000 banded spines; face and underside with coarse greyish brown fur.
- Hedgehogs tend to live for between 4 and 7 years in the wild.
- Hedgehogs are found throughout western Europe, including mainland Britain and Ireland.
- They live in a wide range of habitats, in both urban and rural situations. Absent from large conifer plantations, marshes & moorlands.
- Suburban and urban gardens increasingly important.
- Hedgehogs feed primarily on ground-dwelling invertebrates especially worms, beetles, slugs, caterpillars, millipedes and earwigs.
- They also readily eat meaty cat food or dog food provided by people too.
- Hedgehogs are generally solitary, non-territorial and wide ranging, travelling up to 1-2km a night!
- Hedgehogs are nocturnal.
- They hibernate throughout the winter under piles of logs, leaves and in tall grass. They have also been found to use gaps under sheds.
- When feeding hedgehogs tend to follow linear features – like hedgerows!! Hence the name!

- When threatened hedgehogs roll up into a ball and protect themselves with their sharp spines.
- In urban areas their home range can stretch across lots of different gardens, so connectivity between them is very important.
- Hedgehogs breed between April and September, with peak activity in May and June.
- Courtship involves lots of snorting, barging from the female and perseverance from the male.
- Mother hedgehogs may desert or eat their young if disturbed while nesting.
- Hoglets (baby hedgehogs) emerge from the end of June onwards, are weaned at around 5 weeks old and are independent from then on.
- Females can attempt to have two litters in a year but cannot rear more than one successfully.

Reasons for their Decline

Rural areas

- Widespread use of pesticides reduces the invertebrates hedgehogs eat
- Larger field sizes makes it difficult for hedgehogs to move around the landscape
- Hedgerow management by flailing now leads to the hedges with gappy bases, making them poor habitat for nesting
- Intensive management of pastures with herbicides and fertilizers reduce the amount of invertebrates
- Increasing badgers – the main natural predator – may have an effect where habitat is already degraded
- Permanent pastures are also lost to the plough

Urban Areas

- Impermeable garden fencing and walls limits the area of connected land available
- Gardens lost to car parking or decking directly reduces foraging area
- Busy roads cause mortalities and they can also disrupt dispersal routes for hedgehogs – estimated that 160,000-300,000 are killed on roads annually.
- New developments usually lack any connectivity between gardens
- Hibernation habitat, typically scrubby or brambly areas, are frequently lost through over management or development
- Over-tidy gardening can remove dead wood, replace foraging areas with drives and decking and clear away overgrown corners
- Use of pesticides and slug pellets can poison animals and kills the invertebrates ‘hogs eat
- Litter – hedgehogs can get tangled in litter and garden netting.

How People Can Help Keep Hedgehogs Happy!

- **Create a wild corner** – leaving a corner of uncut grass throughout the year provides important habitat for invertebrates that then feed hedgehogs.
- **Make your pond safe** – hedgehogs are good swimmers but struggle to get out of steep sided ponds. Ramps or stones can be added so they can climb out.
- **Link your garden** – hedgehogs need to roam across a large area to find enough food and suitable habitat. Create a hole in your garden fence so they can move between gardens.
- **Deal with netting and litter** – entanglement in litter and garden netting can kill/harm hedgehogs. Keep your garden free from litter and avoid loose netting.
- **Put out some food and water** – hedgehogs love mealworms, unsalted nuts and meaty cat or dog food! Avoid bread and milk (as hedgehogs are lactose intolerant) but make sure you leave a shallow dish of water out for them to drink!

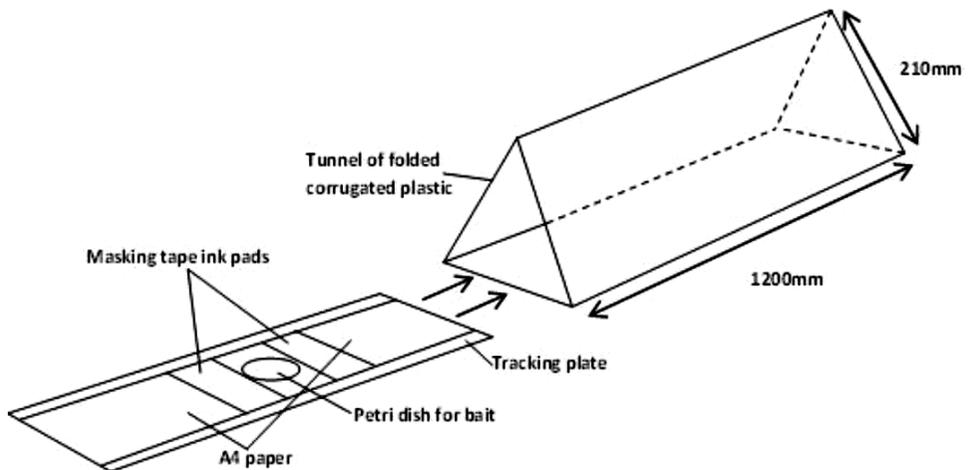
- **Stop using chemicals** – using slug pellets in your gardens removes the hedgehog’s primary food source – try natural alternatives such as copper tape, wool pellets and nematode treatments. Encouraging hedgehogs, frogs and toads into your garden will also reduce the slug population!
- **Build a log or leaf pile** – piles of logs and leaves (or a hedgehog house) provides important food sources for hedgehogs – as lots of insects will live in there and will also provide a safe space for hedgehogs to rest, nest and hibernate.
- **Be careful with bonfires** – bonfires make the perfect place for hedgehogs to hide. Be sure to move the bonfire or check it for hogs before lighting.

What’s MKHogwatch?

- Since 2017, the Parks Trust has led a citizen science project; MKHogwatch, encouraging schools and local community groups to carry out hedgehog surveying on their grounds or gardens.
- Groups are provided with a hedgehog footprint tunnel, recording forms and survey details.
- Survey data is then collected at the end of each season and sent off to hedgehog street and our local environmental records centre.
- Schools can sign up to the project annually,
- Schools can use the tunnel on their grounds once (5 consecutive nights) or a many times as they wish – surveying a number of different habitats.
- Schools/community groups will be awarded a certificate at the end of the survey period.

How to Survey for Hedgehogs

- **Survey season** – hedgehogs are most active between April and October.
- **Survey duration** – footprint tunnels must be left in the same location for 5 consecutive nights.
- **Tunnel location** – tunnels should be placed along linear features, e.g. under hedges, along a fence line or wall.



Daily Checks

1. Tunnels should be checked for footprints – see the footprint guide for help identifying.
2. The masking tape ink pads are painted with fresh paint,
3. The tracking plate is replaced with fresh sheets of paper
4. The dish for bait is replaced with fresh food if empty or low.



← Hedgehog Footprint

Safeguarding Procedures

The Trust operates according to its Safeguarding Policy in relation to working with children or other vulnerable people, which is currently under review. Volunteers engaged in activities that involve coming into regular contact with people in these groups, such as with the Outdoor Learning Team, may be required to complete a Disclosure & Barring Service (DBS) check and to receive relevant training and second induction prior to engaging in such activities. All relevant procedures must then be followed.

Safeguarding Policy Statement

The Parks Trust work involves contact with children either at organised events, outdoor learning sessions or informally. We have adopted the procedures on Child Protection given in the Milton Keynes Area Child Protection Committee Child Protection Procedures. In this context the policy applies to all young persons under the age of 18 years.

The key principles underpinning the policy are that:

- The child's welfare is, and must always be, the paramount consideration.
- All children and young people have a right to be protected from abuse regardless of their age, gender, disability, culture, language, racial origin, religious beliefs or sexual identity.
- All suspicions and allegations of abuse will be taken seriously and responded to swiftly and appropriately.
- When serving as a Hedgehog Ambassador you should be in the presence of the School Staff and need to follow their procedures. Please ensure that you are not left alone with children at any point if avoidable.

Designated Lead:

Sarah Griffiths, Head of Outdoor learning and Interpretation
Mike Thomas, Health and Safety Manager

Volunteer points:

- Never put yourself at risk or in a vulnerable position
- Children should always be supervised/accompanied by their parents/groups leaders or teachers.



For further information please get in touch

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