



GRÁINNEOG

HEDGEHOG

*Erinaceus europaeus*

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The little stars on this map represent the distribution of Hedgehogs throughout Ireland. Each square on the map is equivalent to 100 kilometres by 100 kilometres.

The hedgehog is unlike any of our other small animals. Instead of being soft and furry, its head and body are covered with hard pointed prickles which help to protect it from other animals which might want to eat it. During the daylight hours, the hedgehog lies curled up asleep in a bed of leaves, grass and moss. The prickly little creature usually emerges when the sun goes down, grunting and sniffing, hunting for worms, snails, slugs, beetles and other insects. The hedgehog's sight may be poor but its hearing and sense of smell are very sensitive. The tread of paws on the soil alerts it of possible danger and it will roll up into a ball to protect itself from attack. Hedgehogs are good climbers and good swimmers, too. When

hedgehogs are born, four or five to each litter, they are blind. Their short white spines soon become strong and sharp. The family lives under bushes, in hollows or under tree roots. During autumn, hedgehogs eat as much as possible to get fat for the winter. As the weather gets colder, the hedgehog's food becomes scarce and the animal becomes drowsy and slow-moving. It makes a bed, sometimes in a rabbit hole, and curls up for a long winter's sleep. A mild spell of weather sets in, the hedgehog goes into a deep sleep, waking up in March thin and hungry. It begins to hunt for food at once in the spring sunshine. Hedgehogs do an important job of controlling the number of slugs and snails in our fields and gardens.

PROTECT OUR WILDLIFE – PLEASE DO NOT LITTER