Welcome to our special issue focusing on the Rocky Mountain Hedgehog Show that took place in Denver, Colorado this past October. Our goal is to inform you of the things we have learned as well as give you a look at what a hedgehog show is. I hope you find this issue enjoyable and informative.

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Let the Games Begin

By Linda Woodring

Friday afternoon the Rocky Mountain Hedgehog Show started out with a get-together in the hospitality room where we met some new friends, became re-acquainted with friends we’d met in the past and enjoyed the retro food.

But all good things must be interrupted...for more important tasks...IHOG. For those of you who aren't familiar with hedgehog shows, IHOG is the sports games event of the hedgie world. All IHOG's are a little different, but the original games were a pentathlon of five events: Hurdles, sprint, floor exercise, garden slalom and shot push. Ribbons are awarded in the individual events and gold, silver and bronze medals are given to the overall winners. At the Denver show, Dawn Wrobel decided to just do the hurdles, sprint and floor exercise events to cut down the time needed for the games.

First was the sprint. In this event each hedgie is put on a Hamtrack in his/her exercise ball and timed. The fastest time wins.

In the hurdles, the hedgies have to go through a course of ten hurdles, ranging from ½ inch to 1 ¼ inches high. In this event you are allowed to "bribe" your kids through the course. The hedgehog that has the fastest time is the winner.

The last event was the floor exercise. Each hedgie was put in a playpen with a bunch of toys. They received a point for every toy they touched, up to two points per toy. But, they could also score artistic impression points if they did something special (such as spinning around in a tube, putting both feet up on something, knocking over the horse, etc.). Some of the hedgehogs were really creative with their artistic impressions.

Of course there are always those who would prefer to just sniff around, fall asleep in their balls or run halfway through the hurdles, turn around and go back. But that's the fun of IHOG. Any hedgie can win on any given day. Those that aren't good in one event may excel in another. So when you bring your kid(s) to the next hedgehog show, be sure to bring a ball so they can join in the games.
Why Attend a Hedgehog Show?
By Deb Weaver

I suspect if you would ask 10 different people the question "Why attend a hedgehog show?" You would get 10 different answers. My first answer would be "To meet the people", followed by "For the fun of it". Let me recap my recent trip to the October 2007 Rocky Mountain Hedgehog Show in Denver.

The planning committee of this show is a hard-working group of people who do their best to see that all the participants have a good time. I met friend Linda W. (and may I add that I met her here in the hedgie world) Thursday afternoon at our hotel. The DoubleTree is a wonderful facility, and Linda and I got right down to giggling like teenagers and having fun. We took a tour of downtown Denver on Friday morning. We booked an 8:30 tour so we could sleep in a bit - - imagine our surprise when we were told "We'll pick you up at 7:15"! We enjoyed getting to see Denver.

Once back at the hotel, we started hooking up with other hedgie folks. The chatting, show check-in, hedgie kissing, and laughter began. Friday night the hospitality room opened and many of us gathered there for a meet and greet. The IHOG (International Hedgehog Gym-Bar-E) also took place on Friday night, and we all enjoyed rooting for our favorite hedgie. Saturday was a full day with two conformation shows, three noon-time speakers, lunch, shopping, and an evening banquet that included a rainbow bridge ceremony, auction, and band! Room hopping went on far into the night for many of us.

On Sunday morning we had the chance to listen to three great vets, followed by our keynote speaker, Hugh Warwick from England. Sunday afternoon offered several choices including the opportunity to tour the Denver Zoo, take a trip to the Flash and Thelma Memorial Hedgehog Rescue (Standing Bear’s place), or simply have some relaxing down time. Hedgehog shows can be an exhausting event for hedgie and human alike. On Sunday night 16 of us gathered for one last meal together.

Those of us on e-groups together really get to know each other well and share our joys, sorrows, and hopes with each other. There were two people that I was especially keen to meet in Denver. I have had an email friendship with one for seven years now. The other is a more recent friend I have known for just three years. Meeting both these ladies was the highlight of my trip. Neither looked like I had imagined them, why is that always the case? I also had the opportunity to meet lots of other hedgehog e-group folks, whose names I know well, as well as hooking up once again with folks and friends met at previous shows.

A hedgehog show provides the opportunity for you to run around with a bunch of folks who adore hedgies as much as you do and who won't give you an odd look when you dress your animals up, or baby talk them, or kiss them repeatedly. If you have not attended a show, you are missing out on some wonderful memories!
It was the night before Christmas as Snuffles awoke
For his ears heard squealing and a bellowing call.
He peered out the window as children so small
Scurried into a train enveloped in smoke.
The train conductor spied Snuffles and gave him a wink
As he pulled out his stop watch and started to think.

In a flash Snuffles grabbed his fleece robe and slippers
to match And shot out his cage whilst popping the latch.
He crept down the stairs as to not wake His hairless
parents deep slumber Such care did he take! He scurried
to the foot of the train where the conductor did meet
And scooped Snuffles off his little pink feet. Then placed
in the crook of an elbow with care The conductor
hopped aboard with such flair.

Before Snuffles knew it they were off through the night
To where he knew not as he stifled his fright.
The conductor placed Snuffles on a seat in a booth
Across from a girl she stated as "Ruth".
To Snuffles surprise he conversed with the human with ease.
He asked her "Do you know why we're here, if you please?"
"To see Santa!" She retorted with such moxy Snuffles rolled up. After a moment from his ball he uncurled And peered at the girl.
"And what would you call this marvelous beast?" "The Polar Express." She said, but was soon interrupted. For at that moment the
smell of delights filled their noses. A charming old lady who smelled lovely like roses was pouring thick cups of hot cocoa, and for
dear Snuffles she paused. "You've been expected! That's the word of S. Clause." And into a bowl with mealies she sprinkled. Snuffles
face beamed and his eyes, all a twinkle.

After a length, the train ground to a halt.
To all the windows the children did crowd.
Peering outside where trumpets blared loud.

All the children did clamber out the doors in a rush
To the foot of a magical tree, bright and lush.
There, deer and sleigh stood majestically high.
Poor Snuffle thought forgotten let out a slow sigh.
The conductor from behind did swoop Snuffles up
In unearthly strong hands shaped like a cup.

The crowd went still as Santa did speak.....
"Dear children, my dears....
The time has drawn near
Where the first soul is gifted
with a magical treat."
At that his hand beckoned for again silence to fall.  
And Snuffles afraid as the conductor did shift  
Rolled into a ball.  
He popped, his mood... miffed.
Santa's warm gaze fell on spiked little Snuffles.  
He stood tall in his sleigh as he drew the conductor near.  
His hands outstretched as he received the poor dear.

"Little Snuffles come snuggle as you sit on my sleigh  
And tell me, dear Santa, One wish that you may."  
Santa held Snuffles close as he whispered in ear.  
A soft little chuckle escaped from the words he did hear.  
Then Santa passed word to his elf at hand  
Who drew from his pocket a blade, and from a harness band,  
Cut a small silver sleigh bell then presented to Claus  
Who, with a ribbon, tied it to one of Snuffles tiny paws.  
His heart was pounding as he placed the bell by his ear  
And heard yule tide music caroling clear!

Then as quick as it started, the moment was over.  
They all clambered back onto the smokey black beast.  
Snuffles all snuggled in his cozy robed fleece.  
At that moment to his wrist he did glance  
To find a bare little paw his eyes spied entranced.  
"Oh, no! My bell!" he exclaimed in dismay  
As the train shuffled on without further delay.  
Poor Snuffles did sulk all that long winter ride  
To the porch step of the home where he did reside.  
He slowly skulked off up the stairs to his pen  
And nestled inside of his warm igloo den.

For what seemed a moment his eyes closed, then awoke  
As his furless parents did prod him and poke.  
"Snuffles wake up! There's a gift under the tree!  
It has your name on it." They shouted with glee.  
Snuffles mumbled and stirred as the gift was brought forth.  
He took it, unwrapped it, and stared in disbelief......  
There was the bell that caused him such grief!

He took it in paw and to his ear once again he did raise.  
While his furless parents frowned completely unphased.  
For the magic of Christmas that little Snuffles did hear,  
Rang from the bell ever true, ever clear.  
But Only for those in their hearts who believe  
The magic of Santa and eight tiny reindeer.

~The End~
The Milwaukee Rendezvous Hedgehog Shows

By Molly Dolly Snickerdoodles Sassy Pants Show Queen Weaver and Greta Baby Cakes Cranky Pants Show Princess Weaver

In October of 2006, fifty humans and seventy-five hedgehogs gathered in Milwaukee, Wisconsin for our first show. We had folks from CT, CO, MI, IL, NE, MN, OH, IA and WI here. Phileas Hog served as our guest of honor. We do believe he was quite pleased with the gifts we had for him: A Green Bay Packers uniform and cheesehead, Marquette University sweatshirt, and we outfitted him completely in Harley Davidson gear --- including a motorcycle!

Friday night everyone gathered in our hospitality room for an evening of food and fun. Ms. Dawn Wrobel gave a talk, we had great pizza and veggies to munch on, and then there were some sports events for us pogs to participate in as part of a fund raiser. The vendors were all set up, so some of the Moms didn’t waste any time in getting their shopping done. That nice Sarah S. set up her camera and Phileas posed for pictures with many of us pogs throughout the weekend.

Saturday morning we were off to The Domes (a horticultural attraction here in Milwaukee) for one conformation show. Boy, there sure were a lot of good looking faces up on that table! We lunched and munched on subs, then had some free time to explore this unique facility. Once back at our hotel, we ran (get it?) a few sports events and headed back to our rooms for a short respite before the evening’s festivities.

The show organizers had a nice buffet dinner for everyone and—for us pogs— the biggest bowl of live meals you’ve ever seen! There was a Rainbow Bridge ceremony, a Phileas slide show, a Phileas Look-Alike contest, another speaker (Dr. Donnasue Graesser), and then an auction to raise funds for hedgies in need. Everyone had a blast.

Sunday morning was our second conformation show. Again some good-looking pogs strutted their stuff for the judges. We closed the show with a video tribute to all the Grand Champion hedgies and were honored to have Boris right there with us.

If you weren’t in Milwaukee in 2006, you missed a great time. As luck would have it, we’re having another show. The second Milwaukee Rendezvous Hedgehog Show will take place on October 10, 11, and 12, 2008. Mark your calendars now and plan on attending!!
A Brit’s Take on an American Hedgehog Show
Hugh Warwick

In the UK we love hedgehogs. I have met scores of hedgehog carers, people who dedicate their lives to looking after this unlikely daemon. I thought I had met the most extreme ‘erinaceophiles’. But as always seems the case, when you think you have found an extreme in the UK, it is always worth a glance across the Atlantic to see how to do it properly. So I was thrilled to be invited to speak at the Rocky Mountain Hedgehog Show in Denver this year – as not only would it give me a chance to spread the word about UK hedgehogs, but also give me an insight into this very different world.

And America, oh America, you did not disappoint.

As I watched the spiny psychopath munching on Kristen’s middle finger I began to question, not for the first time that evening, what on earth I was doing here. It wasn’t even a hedgehog. This was a tenrec.

But they are tolerated at the Rocky Mountain Hedgehog Show, despite some owners arguing that they are more closely related to elephants than hedgehogs, by dint of their spines. And it has to be said; they are cute. Long flexible snouts decorated with extensive whiskers, they would only fool someone on a cursory glance. Perhaps the biggest giveaway is the tail, in the hedgehog this is discreetly tucked under the skirt of spines, but in the tenrec it is blessed with its own coverage. But they do smell rather.

Kirsten was not the first tenrec victim of the evening and then a hedgehog started to maul a finger. But this time Kari admitted her culpability, she had just been eating some excessively flavoured tacos, so it was probably the MSG that sent the hog wild.

I have to be honest; I arrived filled with prejudice and scepticism.

I have been involved with hedgehogs for over 20 years. I find them to be a fascinating, attractive, involving creature. But, I also harbour a sneaking feeling that I fundamentally disagree with the entire process of keeping wild animals as pets. Should that have barred me from attending? Yet I also wanted to learn more. Why were people so keen to make a pet of a hedgehog? I have been a hedgehog-lover for many years but have never wanted to change the relationship to one of domestication. In fact part of what I love so much about hedgehogs is their wildness – something that my friend Jay Griffiths writes so wonderfully about in her book Wild – she argues that something that is wild – whether a landscape or a creature – is ‘will’d’ – still retaining their will. That is something so true about the hedgehog; it is a self-willed little animal. And more importantly, they smell.

The wildness is something I kept coming back to and is something that still leaves me wanting to talk more. I do not know what is at the heart of the hedgehog pet world – is it a desire to nurture a little piece of wildness in your lives? Because hedgehogs are great at that; behaving almost like a proto-pet, but being essentially wild. Or is there a desire to breed a domesticated hedgehog? This is not a judgement, just an observation. It feels as if there are two schools of thought trying very hard to co-exist even though it looks as if they are mutually exclusive.
I thought that some of Terry Spraker’s comments were really important, about the potential to be selecting for WHS thanks to the standards requiring compliant, un-wild, hedgehogs on show. That is a conundrum that I cannot see a way out of – if there is going to be a show, then the animals need to be seen. But if the cost of breeding animals that are willing to be shown is that they are more likely to be carrying WHS … is that a price worth paying?

But back to the show – I had such an amazing time and have made life-long friends. I have collected enough material, not just for the chapter in the book I am writing but for an entire book just about you all – and your spiny friends. I was moved by the shared emotion of the ceremony, but I found some of the fund-raising methods rather hard to swallow. Thank goodness I have been a vegetarian for so long that I had a ready-made excuse to avoid the worm-eating auction!

~Editor’s note: Crunchy worms! How much would you be willing to pay to see someone (namely this editor) to chomp on some live mealworms? Well, if you plan on attending the Milwaukee show next year, bring your checkbook.

And Dakota Blond – who organises such a, relatively, small event and manages to score such a great band for the entertainment. It was a shame that more people did not hang around for them.

But I have some bad news. I have been doing loads of reading for the book and have come across a problem: Hedgehog Day. Does it exist? Well, yes it does, because you have made it exist and just like every other significant day – Easter, Christmas, Hedgehog Day – they are all randomly chosen dates given a title. But how long has it been around? I have been reading my Pliny the Elder … he says much (that is very wrong) about hedgehogs, but at no point does he suggest there is a ceremony around them. And I have dug further … nothing. But if it helps, in New Zealand they celebrate it on the 10th September!!

I must conclude this note by thanking, again, all the people who made this wonderful experience possible: Donnasue Graesser for getting it all started (and she is forgiven for sending me to LAX), Jennifer, Susan and all the organisers for supporting her suggestion of getting an ‘exotic’ over for the show; Standing Bear and Virginia for being the most amazing hosts I could imagine and all the new and gorgeous friends I have made. I am trying to persuade my publishers (Bloomsbury US) that they need me to be over there for the launch of my book next year – and that there is no better time than mid-October in Milwaukee to do that … so I might see some of you again; I hope.

If you have suggestions or ideas for items you would like to see in the newsletter, e-mail the editor at newsletter@hedgehogwelfare.org
The Hospitality Room

By Kristen Zorbini Bongard

What would a Hedgehog Convention be without hospitality? To better facilitate good times and camaraderie in a setting that would allow for socialization without piling into someone’s hotel room, the Denver folks were kind enough to have a space all set up for us called the Hospitality Room. It was a place that people could go between events or in the evening before crashing for the night.

Our occasion to enjoy the Hospitality room was the Tacky Party. Why a tacky party? Apparently it is a tradition of our Denver hosts that evolved from some gatherings they have had over the years. Now, you may think you have seen tacky, but this party took the cat-litter-box-looking-cake! The food included a cake decorated to look like a cat litter box, pork rinds, peanut butter and jelly in the same jar, cheese whiz and twinkies. The outfits people wore were amazing! It was like something out of a 70’s/80’s polyester nightmare! And, our hosts being the thoughtful people they are, even provided extra thrift store specials for others to wear if we felt so inclined. I didn’t personally, but I definitely admired those who did!

Part of the hospitality room fun was a beautiful green ceramic hedgehog who took on a life of his own throughout that first night. He was part of the decorations. Well, someone <coughJENNIFERcough> decided he would look nice with some cheese whiz on his nose. I provided a human screen by standing in front of her and enjoying my cat litter box cake. Then lo and behold, when I moved, the green ceramic hedgehog had bright, unnaturally orange semi-liquid cheese on his nose! Yikes! To make matters worse, later in the gathering, he decided to anoint with the cheese. So now, the green ceramic hedgehog had an unnaturally orange stripe down his side along with the blob on his nose. By the time I left, I believe he also had an M&M on his nose but I couldn’t be sure. Hedgehog people sure know how to have a good time!

The Hospitality room was a wonderful space to chill and chat with friends, too. On Saturday night, a few of us purchased some local micro-brewed beers and sat in there discussing tribal belly dancing, good scotch, American laziness and puppies among other things. It was a wonderful setting for some very casual conversation with Hugh, our famous English hedgehog presenter, and to finally talk to our online friends face to face!

So, next time you have the opportunity to attend a hedgehog show with a Hospitality Room, I would encourage you to go. You never know who you’ll meet there, and what fun you’ll have. Besides, who’d want to miss the chance to see a green ceramic hedgehog anoint with cheese whiz?
Once upon a time not so long ago, there was a little (tee hee) hedgehog we all got to know. He has this thing for Reindeers, we are not sure they know, but Baxter loves to watch them as they come and go. His brother has a Shuttle that can fly so very high but it matters not to Baxter, you see as his Reindeers, well they know why. So Baxter decided late one cold and starry night to fire up that shuttle and get himself in flight. So that he could fly up to the North Pole and see and meet those Reindeer and learn just how they came to be..... *by the Sir Snuffy Gang*

He landed safely in the snow though no reindeers he did see. He saw a sign that read "Sandy Paws Workshop" so there he did go. He knocked on the door and little elves showed him in out of the freezing cold.

They gave him hot chocolate, crumbs of the cookies and mealie worms to spare. Baxter could not believe his eyes when he looked around. There were so many presents for all the good hedge girlz and boyz. There were different gift departments for Quilled Gents, Manly Hedgeboyz and the Molly Girlz. But, the sign that interested him the most was the one that read "Sandy Paws Reinydeers": His little heart skipped a beat and he ran to the door. When he opened it to his wondering eyes he did see..... *by Cuddles, Snuggles and Princess*

The most wonderful sight! He knew he'd been right!! Wait until he could get back home and tell Wizard. There really were reindeers, and he was looking at a room full of them! Baxter could hardly catch his breath. "Hello there Baxter" one very big fellow said. "You know my name??" Baxter squeaked in excitement, sniffing noses with the big fellow. "Why of course, I'm Sandy Paws head reindeer, Rudolph, I know all the names of the good hedge boyz and girlz." "How do you know wheres we live?" asked Baxter, "Is that you looking in my windows??". "Now, now Baxter" Rudolph said softly, "I can't tell you our secrets little one".

Rudolph gave Baxter a gentle nudge towards the door "It's time for you to return home son, I'll see you soon enough". *So . . . . By Molly & Greta*

So Baxter, as excited as he was, returned to the shuttle for the long flight home. He just couldn't wait to get home and tell Wizard that he had finally met the famous Rudolph that he had heard so much about. As he took off, all of Sandy Paw's Reinydeers came out of the workshop to wave him goodbye as he pressed his little nose to the shuttle window...a single tear running down his little cheek.

When Baxter returned home he ran right over to Wizard's condo. "Wizzy, wakes up, wakes up" he yelled. "What do you want, kid? Can't you see I'm napping here"?

Now, there was the little issue of Baxter borrowing the space shuttle without permission but he knew Wizard wouldn't mind once he heard about the "mission".

"Wizzy, I is sorry I tooks your space shuttle, but I had to go looks for the reinydeers at the North Pole". And guess what...I founds them and I met Mr. Rudolph himself. He was very nice to me."

"That's great kid. There better not be any scratches on my shuttle." So now that Baxter knows that Sandy Paw's reindeers really do know where he lives and really are checking to see if he's been naughty or nice, he wants to tell all you hedge boyz and girlz that you must be on your best behavior from now until Dec. 25 when Sandy Paws delivers all his presents to all the good hedge kids. ...and to all a good night!

*The End.................* **By Baxter**
One of the most anticipated events at any hedgehog show is the auction. The two auctions held at the Rocky Mountain Hedgehog Show in October were no exception. Although “silent”, the Silent Auction became quite heated as people abandoned their dinners and lingered near their desired objects as the minutes until closure ticked away. The “real” (live?) auction was great fun. The auctioneer, a local television personality, was enthusiastic, quick-witted and quick-tongued; he led a lively battle over highly desired items. Proceeds from the auctions were to be used to support hedgehog rescue and research. The added fun of People Eating Bugs for Rescue raised even more money, inducing more than a few gags and retches in the process.

Copies of a wonderful little book, Dearest Prickles – the Story of a Hedgehog Family by Walter and Christl Poduschka, always create fierce bidding battles. This book, translated from the German by Mary Sworder, has been out of print for many years. Why it ever went out of print is a mystery to me and any other hedgehog fan since it’s funny, accurate, well-written and filled with adorable photos of European hedgehogs. I am grateful to Z. G. Standing Bear, of the Flash and Thelma Memorial Hedgehog Rescue, who finds copies of this book and offers them at auction. I’ve wanted a copy for a long time. Both copies that I saw in CO were from libraries and were marked “DISCARD.” As a book- and hedgehog-lover, I am appalled that anyone would do such a thing! I will treasure my copy forever, stained and torn as it is. A brief review follows. I’m sorry that I can’t upload any of the photos from the book; they can not be adequately described with mere words.

One day in late June, Dr. Poduschka and his wife, Christl, discovered three baby hedgehogs in their garden. The first two, named Snowy and Spotty by the Poduschkas, seemed weak but fairly healthy. The third, found later and named Little Fellow, was found to have a very infected ear and many maggots. A search for the mother was unsuccessful. After offering the babies diluted milk, they placed them in a box and left them near where Little Fellow was found, hoping that the mother would find them that night. While waiting, the Poduschkas summarized all they could find about hedgehogs for themselves and their lucky readers. This included Conrad von Megenberg’s amusing and ancient description of the “cirogrillus … called a hedgehog [which] … is brave and fierce and deadly to other allied things on earth.” If only!

The hedgehog mom never returned and the babies were adopted by the Poduschkas. Despite their tender loving care and nights and days of worry, Little Fellow died, but Snowy and Spotty thrived and grew.

Since there was little information available on proper diets for human-raised hedgehog babies, the Poduschkas tried various foods with mixed results. There were episodes of vomiting and neon green waste but the day they offered the hedgehogs live mealworms, nirvana was reached. Amusingly, the authors note that:

- Both of them now take mealworms gladly but in doing so they show that hedgehogs prefer being given their food, rather than looking for it.
- They calmly take one mealworm after another from the pile in front of them, but never dream of chasing deserters from the pile and bringing them back to their sad fate.

I guess you can quickly spoil European hedgies, too!

Spotty and Snowy soon became very close to their human caretakers, climbing up on ankles for attention, anointing on new and fun things, and enjoying a shoulder sit and hair nibble on Christl whenever possible. These activities are all documented in photos, including a series of photos showing Spotty diving headfirst into a jar of mealworms. It is really funny. A round little hedgehog butt up in the air is cute in any country and any language.

As autumn came, the Poduschkas started letting Spotty and Snowy make their own nests out in the garden, but the hedgies still sought out cuddles in the evening. In fact, just as our little African hedgies do, they both enjoyed climbing inside a shirt for a long nap when they had the chance.

As the two resident hedgehogs fattened up for hibernation, another wee hedgehog was found in the Poduschka's garden. Bennie, as they named him, was very small and clearly unready to hibernate. They concluded that he was probably the product of a second litter. Babies from second litters are often unable to prepare for hibernation, having been born so late in the
season. Despite difficulties in keeping their mealworm farm productive enough to accommodate the enormous appetites of Spotty and Snowy, the Poduschkas began to fatten Bennie up. By far the best photo in the book is the one of Snowy, “amply prepared for winter” at 1750 grams. The round tummy, the rolls under the arms ... that boy is ready to sleep!

All three hedgehogs hibernated and the Poduschkas checked on them frequently. There is an interesting description of the changes and adaptations involved in hibernation, which is an amazing physiological event. Bennie awoke early and came back into the house, where his truly funny personality was duly noted, described, and photographed. The photos of Bennie’s smiles are priceless. Finally, in March, Snowy and Spotty awoke and after some recovery and wake-up time, were found to have hibernated successfully.

The Poduschkas end their diary with a lovely poem, which begins:

“Why the Lord our God created on this earth
So many kinds of beast, which are so fine and dear ...”
- Anonymous, 1718.

I couldn’t agree more, and I sense that the Poduschkas feel the same way about hedgehogs; “so fine and dear”.

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How do hedgies spend their Holidays?
Skiing of course!
Talks on Wobbly Hedgehog Syndrome
At the Rocky Mountain Hedgehog Show
October 2007
By Laura C. Dunklee

For me, among the highlights of the Rocky Mountain Hedgehog Show, were the Saturday afternoon speakers who addressed the topic of Wobbly Hedgehog Syndrome (WHS). Each of the three speakers covered different WHS-related topics and, taken together, they gave us hedgehog caretakers ideas for caring for WHS-stricken hedgehogs and more insight into the research that is being done.

Dr. Terry Spraker –
Dr. Spraker, who was the Hedgie Hero in the July/August issue of the HWS Newsletter, is the top WHS researcher in the United States. As a diagnostic pathologist with Colorado State University’s College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences, Dr. Spraker has been instrumental in performing multiple necropsies on hedgehogs, looking for the tell-tale signs that their movement issues were related to WHS. Dr. Spraker’s talk focused on some of the clinical signs of WHS noted in living hedgehogs and pointed out some interesting similarities in the comments of their caretakers, namely:

- The hedgehogs tend to be good tempered
- The hedgehogs presented with progressive ataxia (lack of muscle coordination), sometimes starting with their front limbs, sometimes starting in the hind limbs
- The hedgehogs tend to maintain a good appetite throughout the progress of the disease
- The hedgehogs appear to remain bright, alert, and friendly
- The hedgehogs do not become aggressive as the disease progresses.

Dr. Spraker also shared a series of slides containing tissue samples from the brains and brain stems of WHS hedgehogs. These images clearly showed the lesions present in the affected tissues and were presented in contrast with “normal” tissue samples. This helped emphasize the tissue destruction that happens in WHS. Using slides, Dr. Spraker showed how the disease progresses through the neurological system of the hedgehog’s body, starting in the brain and then moving to the brain stem and into the spinal cord.

Dr. Spraker ended his presentation by emphasizing a couple of important points:

- We (the hedgehog community) should look at the genetic traits that we are breeding into our animals to see if by breeding for temperament we might not be inadvertently breeding for neurological problems as well.
- Much more research needs to be done to determine the cause of WHS, to develop a pre-death test for it, and to wipe out the disease.

Jennifer Plombom
Jennifer was the second speaker on WHS. Her presentation focused on nursing and caring for hedgehogs with WHS. Jennifer has cared for several wobbly hedgehogs and, as a nurse, she has great insight into both the physical and mental/emotional needs of WHS hedgehogs. What stood out for me was the following information:

- The fact that WHS hedgehogs have difficulty moving does not mean that their minds are not working—they are still alert and aware. We caretakers need to keep their minds stimulated while their bodies become immobilized.
Jennifer spoke of habitat enrichment, including the need to keep offering hedgehogs new scents and new things to view in order to keep their minds active and help them remain engaged in the world. She also talked about the special challenges of caring for WHS hedgehogs, such as daily feeding, cleaning and interaction routines.

Although I have cared for several WHS-stricken hedgehogs and thought I knew a lot about their needs and care requirements, I came away from Jennifer’s talk with more ideas about how to keep my wobbly hedgehogs comfortable, content and interested in their surroundings as they gradually lose their mobility.

**Vicki McLean**

The final speaker for the WHS presentation was Vicki McLean. Vicki is a Licensed Massage Therapist and Reiki Master in addition to being a hedgehog caretaker who has cared for many WHS and movement-impaired hedgehogs. In her talk, Vicki spoke about the importance of working with our WHS hedgehogs to keep their muscles limber and flexible, and to discourage atrophy (wasting that happens with the disease). She was also able to show the audience some basic massage techniques, working on a WHS hedgehog from the audience. It was extremely helpful not just to hear her speak, but to actually see the correct ways of gently manipulating the hedgehog’s body and muscles to relieve some of the contractions caused by WHS.

Later Kristen B. was able to videotape Vicki demonstrating her massage techniques on another hedgehog, narrating as she worked on the animal. This video is now available online at: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GVyA8Yn15cs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GVyA8Yn15cs). I encourage anyone interested in hedgehog massage or working with WHS hedgehogs to view the video.

The three presentations on Wobbly Hedgehog Syndrome were well-coordinated, informative, and compelling. The show coordinators deserve a big thank you for bringing in the speakers. Thanks also to Dr. Spraker, Jennifer, and Vicki for sharing their insights and experiences.

*We hope you enjoyed this look at the Rocky Mountain Hedgehog Show and hope you will consider attending the next show in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.*