Caring for a Sight-Impaired Hedgehog

Laura C Dunklee. HWS Co-Chair for Health, Research, and Education

Sometimes a hedgehog loses their sight. This can be a gradual process, such as cataracts in one or both eyes, or it can be the result of a trauma, such as the hedgehog scratching or injuring their eye or the eye bulging or becoming dislodged from the socket, which is called proptosis or exophthalmos. Other issues include birth defects, infections, and tumors. If the eye is removed, surgically or by the hedgehog scratching it out, it is called enucleation.

While it can be emotionally difficult for guardians to see a hedgehog with sight issues, most adjust easily (er) and the loss of vision does not appear as stressful as it would be for us humans.

That being said, if you have a hedgehog with sight-related issues, there are some things you should do to ensure their safety and comfort.

**INTERACTION**

Always let your hedgehog know you’re approaching, whether you’re doing something in their habitat or getting ready to handle them. Most guardians recommend speaking to the hedgehog to let them know you’re there. Others suggest tapping on the side of the habitat or their food dish, especially if you are feeding them.

When you have your hedgehog out, you’ll need to gauge what makes them comfortable and what upsets or stresses them. According to Jenny Lynn, her hedgehog, Corpus Cristi, has cataracts in both eyes. She becomes frantic when held or in a play pen: she wants to be in her familiar habitat.
(Interestingly, Corpus Cristi lives with another — female — hedgehog and having a companion seems to calm her.)

On the other hand, Tara’s Pebbles, who has lost both eyes, is no longer a cuddler. Because it’s always “night” to her, when she’s being handled she wants to explore and run around. And Dale’s Taddy, who lost both eyes, enjoyed exploring in his run-around ball!

Melissa’s hedgehog, Bella, has cataracts. Melissa suggests that when you put your hedgie back in their habitat, you always put them back in the same place, so they immediately know where they are.

You know your hedgehog best, so follow their lead in what is comfortable for them.

**BEHAVIOR**

**Personality Change**

Victoria’s Valentine, has become a bit less huffy since losing sight. Victoria attributes some of this change to the regular handling required for medicating and tending the eyes. And Jennifer’s Khaki, who has cataracts, is also friendlier.

Two of Dale’s hedgehogs, Wall.e and Chewy, who both had cataracts, showed no personality change. The same is true for Christine’s Hugo and Chloe. James says his hedgehog, Snowcap, also had no real change in his behavior or personality, other than the obvious change in depth perception.

*Continued on page 3*
Continued from page 2

Conversely, Dianne notes that her hedgehog, Peanut, becomes frantic if the routine changes. Again, be attentive to your hedgehog’s behavior and comfort level.

**Activity**

You may or may not notice some activity changes in your hedgehog, especially if they’ve lost sight in both eyes. Because they do not have any means of discerning day from night, their sleeping and waking schedule may shift.

Crystel’s Leela, who is missing both eyes, is often out eating and doing hedgehog things during the day. Naomi mentioned that two of her hedgehogs, Buckwheat and Meggie, both became day-wheelers. And Tara’s Pebbles now lives in her habitat in the family’s living room. Pebbles is awake during the day and whenever there’s activity in the room. If she smells food, she is out and begging to be fed!

I had a hedgehog, Little Mister Mogget, who was missing one eye. While he maintained a normal nocturnally-active schedule, he always wheeled with his blind side facing out. This seems counter-intuitive to me, as I’d think one would want to be able to see what’s going on in one’s environment, but it was how he adapted.

**CARETAKING**

In order to help your hedgehog adjust to their new, limited sight, you will want to make some adjustments in their care.

**Bathing**

Shelia mentions that when her Ziggy developed cataracts, she would swish around his bath water before putting him in, so he knew what was happening. When Dianne is bathing Peanut, who has cataracts in both eyes, she does so in a sink with a fleece square at the bottom for traction. Also, Dianne always keeps her hand on or under his body, so he knows she’s there and feels more secure and speaks to him the entire time.

**Feeding**

Chances are pretty good your hedgehog will find their food with no problems. Even my completely blind and deaf hedgehog, Nala, excelled when finding mealworms in her dig bowl. Chances are pretty good your hedgehog will find their food with no problems. Even my completely blind and deaf hedgehog, Nala, excelled when finding mealworms in her dig bowl!

*Continued on page 4*
HABITAT

Arrangement

The biggest thing you can do for your hedgehog with sight issues is to keep their habitat setup the same way at all times. In other words, every time you clean, refill the food and water dishes, or otherwise move things around, put them back in the same place. This was noted by almost all the people who responded to my request for ideas.

Persephone had a hedgehog, Squiggy, who had cataracts in both eyes. If she had to make changes in his habitat, Persephone used her hand to guide Squiggy around the enclosure, thereby “showing” him where everything was now located.

Victoria made several adjustments to Valentine’s cage. She has changed to a lower-lipped litter pan, to make it easier for Valentine to get in and out without stumbling. She’s also switched from pellets in the litter pan to folded paper towels, as Valentine was having trouble balancing on the uneven surface. In addition to these changes, I strongly recommend removing anything hard that the hedgehog might run into and injure themselves on, especially a water bottle with a spout.

DON’T STRESS

I’ve had the honor of caring for several hedgehogs with sight issues. Every single one of them adapted quite well; none appeared traumatized by the change in their sight, though those who lost an eye due to an injury took a bit longer to adjust.

Talk with your hedgehog, keep their habitat in the same arrangement, and pay attention to their behavior. You know your little one’s personality and will understand what they need to live full, happy lives!
Thoughts from the President

By Deb Weaver

When I was a kid growing up my Dad always used to tell me “when you lose your good name you’ve lost everything” (my Dad died when I was 23, and I can still hear him saying this to me). As a kid my thought upon hearing this was usually “huh?”

I wasn’t too far into adulthood when I came to realize what my Dad was trying to teach me: We need to live our lives in a manner that reflects whom we truly are, and we are always going to be held accountable for our actions and words. Honesty is a personality trait everyone should possess.

I find the current political climate, and the presidential campaign, equally fascinating and horrifying. The name calling, bullying, use of nick names, finger pointing and downright screaming and yelling is beyond belief. Everyone needs to go back to grade school and re-learn grade school etiquette. Our Founding Fathers must be collectively spinning in their graves.

When I was in my 20s, I had a very short fuse and a bad temper. Now, at 61, I’m having trouble remembering exactly what I was so angry about back then. What angered me then is now (for the most part) amusing to me. I no longer get caught up in other people’s dramas. I no longer care so deeply about what other people think about me. I do the best that I can every day. I try to be kind, compassionate and caring. I always tell the truth. And, I associate myself in my personal life, in my professional life, and in my volunteer activities, with people who conduct themselves in the same manner. See Dad, I was listening.

As this is our last newsletter until September, I’d like to take this opportunity to wish you all a happy summer, which stretches on and on. And don’t forget to take those extra steps needed to ensure your hedgies are enjoying their summer too!

Clip art from http://www.clker.com/
British Hedgehog’s Quills Cut Off With Scissors!

On Saturday April second, a maintenance man at Sheffield University in Sheffield, England, was working in the kitchen of a residence hall when a hedgehog came running up to him! The man was shocked to see that most of the animal’s quills had been cut off!

The hedgehog was immediately taken to Cawthorne Hedgehog Rescue and Care Center in Barnsley, South Yorkshire. He was given painkillers to calm down and the incident was reported to the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

Allan and Anita Broadhead, proprietors of the Cawthorne center, who named the hedgehog Frankie, said they had never seen a hedgehog “in such a state of neglect and deliberate harm.” Frankie was seen by a veterinarian and, although x-rays revealed no broken bones, he was described as “terribly stressed, dehydrated, and really traumatized.” He was also suffering from ringworm which is likely to have spread to his attacker.

It is not known if Frankie’s quills will grow back. If they do, it may take as long as eight months for the cut spines to shed and new quills to grow in their place. The average British hedgehog has about 5,000 spines and thousands of Frankie’s quills were cut off.

Meanwhile, a Sheffield University spokesman says the university is trying to determine why a hedgehog was in university housing.

You can view a short Internet video of Frankie at the web site listed below:

http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/04/06/traumatised-hedgehog-recovers-after-its-spines-were-cut-off-with/

Sources for this article:

  http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/04/06/traumatised-hedgehog-recovers-after-its-spines-were-cut-off-with/

- Metro Co UK   Tiny hedgehog nursed back to health after its spines were cutoff
  http://metro.co.uk/2016/04/05/tiny-hedgehog-nursed-back-to-health-after-its-spines-were-cut-off-5797776/
2016 Wheel-a-thon

by Kristen Bongard

The 2016 Wheel-a-thon was a smashing success! Our teams raised $2,236.16 this year for the Hedgehog Welfare Society. This will help pay for care packages to new adopters, help with vet bills for rescued hedgehogs, and supports the creation and distribution of educational and health resources for hedgehog lovers around the world.

Thank you so much to our teams, the donors and everyone who helped run the Wheel-a-Thon from behind the scenes. We couldn’t do it without you!
Meet  Agave Stricta, also known as Hedgehog Agave

By Margaret Myhre

Agave stricta, more commonly known as Hedgehog Agave, Hedgehog Century Plant, or rabo de léon, is a flowering cactus or succulent from the family Agavaceae. It is native to the Oaxaca and Puebla regions of southern Mexico.

This evergreen succulent, is known for its symmetrical rosettes of narrow, spine-tipped leaves, which usually grow from one to three feet wide and one to three feet tall. The plant spreads via ground-hugging stems which connect colonies of rosettes. At the end of it’s life cycle, each hedgehog-shaped rosette produces a tall flowering stem before dying and another satellite rosette from the ground-hugging stem takes its place.

Hedgehog Agave’s size and symmetrical shape make it suitable for rock gardens, containers, slopes and urban planting. However, they should be planted where their spiny leaves will not hurt people passing by.

The USDA Hardiness Zone for Hedgehog Agave is 8 to 10 and The American Horticultural Society’s Heat Zone is 12–5. These plants prefer full sun. They prefer periods of drought and should be watered slowly and allowed to dry completely between soakings.
The Literary Hedgehog: Hedge-Hedgey-Hedgehogs

This small book for beginning readers is part of Penguin Random House's "Penguin Young Readers' Level 2 series" which is designed for “progressing” readers. Other titles in the series include: Pup-Pup-Puppies, Kit-Kit-Kittens, Pig-Piggy-Pigs, Ham-Ham-Hamsters, and Slow-Slow-Sloths.

Given the constraints of writing for beginning, or even “progressing” readers, it's safe to assume that the illustrations play a critical role in making this book attractive to children. Beautiful, color photographs of hedgehogs appear on nearly every one of the 32 pages in this book. Although most feature African Pygmy Hedgehogs, at least two of the pictures are of larger European hedgehogs.

The text, unfortunately has some flaws. No attempt has been made to explain that hedgehogs come in different sizes and species, or that not all hedgehogs are pets.

There are also several misleading statements such as:

"Hedgehogs are small animals. They only weigh about one pound.” (page 8)

"It is not hard to take care of a hedgehog. It only needs about two spoons of food a day.” (page 16)

"Hedgehogs should go to the doctor. Just like you do. But your hedgehog only needs to go once a year.” (pages 30-31)

For these reasons, I would not recommend this book to children or adults.

Hedgie Goes Exploring

Photos by Margaret Myhre

Wow! Look at this!!

Cool!

Whew! I’ve gotta get out of here!!
Hedgehog Birthdays

May 1     Wally Weaver
May 29    Fancy Ernst
June 12   QE2 Becker
June 25   Crimson Marshall
July 2     Hector Becker
August 4  Doug Becker

July 15   Bryan Nastuk
July 15   Rose Nastuk
July 15   Enrique Nastuk
July 15   Billi Nastuk
July 4     Sebastian Becker
August 16  Boomer Becker

Writers Wanted

Would you like to write for the Newsletter? We are always looking for stories, poems, craft projects, recipes, puzzles, and articles to include here.

Send your submissions or article proposals to:
newsletteer@hedgehogwelfare.org

Artists Wanted

Would you like to help illustrate the Newsletter? We are always looking for drawings, photographs and artwork to include here.

Send your submissions in JPEG format to:
newsletteer@hedgehogwelfare.org