



The Hedgehog Welfare Society

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HEAR YE! HEAR YE!

The HWS has a brand new look. We've updated our website to make it more user friendly and to catch up with current technology. It is now easier to view if you're using your cell phone or notebook. We brightened up the colors a bit. And the best new feature is you can search the newsletters. Just type in a word like "mites" and it will bring up any newsletters where mites were discussed. It still has the same information in a more compact form. Please check it out and let us know what you think! And thanks to Brian, our web master, for the great work!

Hoping to Get Some Help & Insight

An HWS member contacted the HWS hoping for some help and insight. Seeking to better the lives of her hedgehogs, she wanted to clarify some information she had received, unasked for, from a hedgehog breeder who told her, among other things, that:

Since hedgehogs have relatively small brains with fewer sulci and gyri than might be expected, they are unintelligent and should not be given a wheel in their cage, as they will simply run themselves to death, not having the cognitive ability to stop. This belief was justifiably condemned by the hedgehog guardians in the HWS, none of whom have observed a hedgehog run to her/his death, and most of whom have seen them run for a bit, step off for a snack or to potty and to take a brief nap, then climb on to run some more ... and who have also seen how frantic and anxious their hedgehogs can get when their wheel must be removed for a period of time, such as after surgery. It's well established by hedgehog guardians that a wheel of the proper size (10" in diameter for petite 'hogs, 12" in diameter for larger 'hogs) is essential for their health and peace of mind. For a discussion of

cussion of the relative intelligence of Insectivores, please visit this site:

<https://anatomypubs.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/ar.a.20265>

That in order for hedgehogs to have a healthy life, their guardians must know hedgehogs lack a cecum.

The cecum is a pouch – or tube - like structure located at the beginning of the large intestine. It holds undigested food, aids in the absorption of water and salts , and is important in the fermentation of certain substances by beneficial bacteria. Herbivores such as cattle have large cecums because they are necessary for breakdown of the large amount of plant material they eat. How does this knowledge help you to understand your hedgehog? Basically, it means that they are insectivores and carnivores and not herbivores, so their diet should not consist of plant material. There. Now you know.

That Hedgehog Precision foods are dangerously high in phosphorus and will lead to death from kidney failure in a year.

One of our Board members stated that her veterinarian, who has been a small exotic vet for his entire career, and has been involved in many studies, has looked at Kimberly's food and concluded it was an acceptable food. Kimberly and her partner, Nathan, have degrees in Zoology, Animal Sciences and Sustainability, a minor in Business and have studied animal nutrition, as well as pet food formulation. Neither they nor their customers have seen or reported decreased life spans in their hedgehogs due to renal failure.

That ceramic heat emitters with thermostats are dangerous and can cause house fires. Well, first of all, using a thermostat actually makes it safer and less likely to overheat! But, in fact, some sources recommend that these heaters not be left on overnight or unattended. Hedgehogs MUST be warm; their room needs to be around 74 – 76 degrees to prevent attempted hibernation. African hedgehogs, unlike the European species, do not normally hibernate and are likely to die in the attempt. Safe room heaters are one option, and another very good option is to have the heat right where the hedgehog actually *is*; in other words, have a heating pad on the bottom of the cage or under the cage so that when they sleep, they sleep on warmth. You need to find a heating pad WITHOUT an automatic shut-off (they are available on Amazon) or it will shut off and not come on again, leaving your hedgehog cold.

That dust mites are a major concern for hedgehogs and that hedgehogs should be on a schedule of routinely being treated with Revolution. No they are not, and no they should not receive routine Revolution without a medical evaluation. Dust mites are not parasitic; you have them all over your house and bed and they aren't biting you! Revolution is a poison (or it wouldn't kill mites or fleas) and unless a veterinarian determines that your hedgehog has parasites that require being treated with a poison, you should not routinely give it.

Maybe It's Not Wobbly Hedgehog Syndrome – Caring for Spondylosis/ Spinal Arthritis

By Elaine Becker

In 18 years of rescuing hedgehogs, I have only ever had 1 case that actually was Wobbly Hedgehog Syndrome, or WHS! (A recent sad case had epilepsy, only diagnosed when I saw him seizing.) Every other case was something else - some treatable, some not. But finding out what was the real cause made it possible to give them the best available treatment.

WHS is a genetically-mediated disease found in hedgehogs that causes neurological weakness and damage, eventually progressing to almost complete paralysis and death. It usually manifests at a young age, around 1-2 years of age, and begins with weakness in a rear (most common) or front leg.

WHS is a diagnosis that is applied after all other options have been checked for and treated, since a true diagnosis can only be obtained via necropsy after the hedgehog has died or been euthanized. If it is WHS, I've used Vitamin D and/or UV light (which may help in Multiple Sclerosis in humans, since WHS shows a similar demyelination of nervous tissue), amino caproic acid and/or gabapentin.

There's extensive info here:

<https://www.angelfire.com/wa2/comemeetmyfamily/wobblyhs1.html>

Many have come in with people thinking that the hedgehog has WHS and has actually had:

- malnutrition if improperly fed or underfed
- an ear infection (seen by a vet for exam/antibiotic)
- too chilled (keep them warm)
- too dehydrated (use a low sided bowl instead of a bottle)
- cancer (various types & degree - some treatable, some hospice or euthanized)
- dental problems - weak and losing weight because they can't chew (need a vet exam, extraction, meds, soft foods)
- GI infection - weak and losing weight, because they can't digest food properly need a (vet exam, meds)
- overgrown toenails cutting into tender paw pads - can cause pain, infection, limping, lack of exercise and weight gain
- spinal arthritis/pinched nerve (see below)

For all cases - in addition to warmth & padding to keep them comfortable, make sure they have low sided bowls for food & water.

Spondylosis/spinal arthritis:

An older hedgegie that is capable of walking but stops using their wheel or seems to have weak back legs most likely has spinal arthritis (spondylosis) and/or pinched nerves that can be quickly diagnosed with an x-ray. This can be reduced/prevented by giving glucosamine/chondroitin and omega 3 oils starting at age 3 or onset of walking issues.

Glucosamine/chondroitin can be bought over the counter for people or pets. I use the human stuff - 1 daily dose for people, ground to a fine powder, sprinkled on about a pound of kibble. (I got a nice small marble mortar & pestle at the health food store for \$8.) The pet version is usually in flavored chews; the cat or small dog ones would be closer to the right size for a hedgegie, but would still need cut into several pieces. Check the weight of animal it's meant for and divide by the hedgehog's weight to determine how many pieces to make. Omega 3 oil is also over the counter, for humans or pets. It can be in oil capsules that you would poke with a pin and dribble on food - or a squirt or dropper bottle that would be less messy. A drop or two on food is all that's needed; no need to syringe feed.

The Hedgehog Welfare Society Databases

By Vicki McLean

The Hedgehog Welfare Society has a Mortality Database and a Jaw Tumor Database. These can be found on our website at www.hedgehogwelfare.org under "Resources". Any hedgehog who dies can be entered into the Mortality Database, and any hedgehog who has a jaw tumor can also be entered into the Jaw Tumor Database. We are looking to increase the usefulness of these databases. The databases have limitations since information is self-reported, rather than a random sample; but we can make them more useful. The more people who contribute information related to their hedgehog's death regardless of cause into the databases, the more useful the databases will be.

To be truly accurate, these entries need necropsies and histopathologies. To the extent you have them available, they can be emailed to poogs_house@msn.com. If one is not available, please submit information to the best of your knowledge. It is noted as "no pathology" in the reports.

Because so many universities are trying to find the cause, genetic origin, or cure for Wobbly Hedgehog Syndrome (WHS), histopathologies on suspected cases would be extremely helpful. HWS has allotted some funding to defray the cost of processing histopathology for hedgehogs suspected of dying from WHS. Some criteria must be met. If you have a hedgehog who is suspected of having this disease, please contact poogs_house@msn.com for further information so you can be prepared to work with us, your veterinarian, and for tissue to be sent to our pathologist. One of our goals is to establish to the best of our ability how many hedgehogs with WHS-appearing symptoms do have WHS as opposed to mimicking neurological disorders as well as an approximation of the percentage of all deaths that are truly from WHS.

If you would like financial assistance with the cost of the histopathology for WHS, please contact Vicki McLean @ poogs_house@msn.com at least two weeks prior to euthanasia or death of your hedgehog to be sure there is ample time to process paperwork. Please also contact Vicki with questions you may have.

THIS IS SELF-REPORTED INFORMATION AND THEREFORE LIMITED IN ANY CONCLUSION THAT CAN BE REACHED FROM IT.

Welcome to Our New Rescue Coordinator, Elaine Becker

Elaine has been a long-time member of the HWS; in fact, she was one of the members who came to TX to help with the PETA/TX SPCA/USFWS rescue effort in 2009/2010. In February of 2024, Elaine took over the Rescue Coordinator position from Linda Woodring (thank you for your most excellent long service, Linda!) and has continued to place relinquished and rescued hedgehogs into new, well-vetted homes.

Whether you're looking to give a hedgehog a home, or need to find a new home for your current hedgehog, you will appreciate Elaine's concern and professionalism as she helps you with your needs.

The HWS Rescue Care Packages Project

By Jennifer Plombon

When the Hedgehog Welfare Association was formed in 2002, its founders wanted to emphasize rescue over breeding, and good health over just adequate care. So the idea of Care Packages was created. Anyone who adopted a rescued/relinquished hedgehog through the HWS was to be sent a Care Package, free of charge, containing food samples of foods we thought were healthy for hedgehogs, as well as snuggle sacs and hiding hats to keep hedgies warm and give them a place to hide. In addition, the packages would include a care sheet, other written information hedgehog guardians might need, and offers for free or reduced-cost supplies from businesses selling hedgehog supplies. Over the years, more than 1200 packages have been sent to hedgehog guardians in the U.S. and Canada, and while the specific supplies have changed with the times, the packages have always been warmly received and found to be useful by our hedgehog adopters and rescuers. Current packages contain food and treat samples from Hedgehog Precision, Fromm cat food, and an offer for a reduced price on Larry's wheels. All of it is tucked into a warm snuggle sac (see below) along with care and informational sheets. Sending these out has been my personal mission since 2002, and my favorite thing to do to support the mission of the HWS.



In 2023:

The total number of applicants to rescue a hedgehog was 209.

The number of relinquishments was 422.

The number of hedgehogs placed with an applicant was 95.

Aftermath of the Great Texas Rescue

By Jennifer Plombon

On December 15, 2009, PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals), using evidence from an undercover operative, joined with the Texas SPCA and the Texas branch of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to seize over 27,000 starving, suffering and dying exotic animals from a warehouse in Dallas TX. The owner of the warehouse had for years been shipping exotic animals into the Dallas-Fort Worth airport for use in the pet trade. To save on costs, they were often left crammed into their shipping crates, or dumped in great numbers into horse watering troughs, and rarely if ever given water or food but left to survive as best they could until they were bought for use as pets. The species rescued included over 700 hedgehogs, as well as Kinkajous, agoutis, sloths, wallabies, frogs, snakes, turtles and tortoises, lizards, hamsters, lemurs, Guinea pigs and chinchillas.

Thankfully, the TX SPCA had recently purchased a warehouse of their own, with the intention of combining their scattered offices and shelters into one location. Already plumbed and with heat and electricity, and completely empty, it was the perfect place to set up a rescue site for 27,000 animals. It took until mid-February for all the animals to be sent to sanctuaries, zoos, pet stores (for adoption, not for sale!) and homes. Sadly, none of them, such as the sloths and wallabies, could be returned to their wild homes, due to precarious health and exposure to disease. A testament to the expert care they all received was that very few of the animals died or required euthanasia once they arrived at the SPCA warehouse for care.

Veterinarians and animal care experts from around the world came to Dallas to save the animals. The Hedgehog Welfare Society was asked to come care for and establish adoptions for the 700+ hedgehogs. While I stayed for over 2 months, other HWS members came for shorter periods of time to help care for the hedgehogs (and we all got a chance to care for other animals, too. I treasure the opportunity I had to work with the sloths). HWS Board members Kristen Zorbini, Vicki McLean, Elaine Becker, Judie Peters and Gioia Kerlin all spent time in TX.

It was an intensely painful and yet rewarding experience; the animals were in terrible, terrible shape, and there was evidence of extreme suffering. But over the 2 months, they received love and food and water and warmth and love and found homes. Leaving that big empty warehouse on my last day, I wondered if it would ever be a happy place. Well, it is!

My husband and I went to Dallas to watch the solar eclipse on April 8, 2024, and I planned for a free day to visit that warehouse, now the site of an animal shelter, clinic and offices for the SPCA. After telling the story of my experience with the 2009/2010 rescue, we were given a special tour of the site. Our tour guide said that the "Great Rescue" was a legend to those who worked there now, and that there were a few people still there who were there then. The building is just beautiful. The different areas for different animals (only dogs, cats and small mammals, thank you – no sloths or wallabies) are specific to their needs, and the clinic is state-of-the-art. The whole building is bright, warm, cheerful and happy and I was overwhelmed with gratitude to see it being used to help animals again. After the tour, we met with Maura Davies, Vice President, Marketing and Communications, who was one of the SPCA employees present at the original seizure from the first warehouse. I told her that remembering the suffering I saw after the animals had been rescued was so traumatiz-

ing, and she said that what she saw when they were seized was so much worse, she wasn't sure she'd ever get over it. After we cried together, we looked around at the absolutely wonderful building full of loved and cared-for animals, and agreed that this was how to get over it; celebrate what the place became.

Here are a few photos:



THEN – temporary sign



THEN - original SPCA warehouse in the snow (yes, of course we had snow during the rescue!)



THEN - many, many bins were needed for all the hedgehogs and other smaller animals. The sloths got a “rain

forest” of climbing poles and branches inside an enclosure of shower curtains with humidifiers



THEN – just a few of the many turtles



NOW – the gorgeous entrance



NOW – the clinic. During the rescue, the “clinic” consisted of some tables and bins full of animal care neces-

sities brought by the caregivers who came from all over the world to help

If you find yourself in Dallas, do stop in to the SPCA at [2400 Lone Star Dr, Dallas, TX 75212](https://www.spcadallas.org/) and thank them for all they did. You can explore their web site at <https://spca.org/>