



# HEDGEHOG CARE

## LINCOLNSHIRE'S FAMOUS LITTLE HEDGEHOG HOSPITAL

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## 2009 ANNUAL REVIEW

Over years of hedgehog caring I hear through the grapevine that I am regarded as a "bunny hugger", blunt, unkempt and frequently resort to colourful vocabulary. I'm not ashamed of my image and now I'm 70 don't intend to change my ways. After nearly 30 years of sharing my life and home with hedgehogs I feel I understand them and their habits and needs as intimately as anyone and will continue to cherish and preserve them as long as I live.

Throughout each and every long day I am contacted via telephone by the widest range of people you could imagine. Because of their concern for animals in distress, most of these people are kind, obliging and generous. They want help and advice for a species which often they know relatively little about but are extremely anxious to do their best to save. I attempt to spread my knowledge verbally if they are too far away to bring them. I don't mind my ability being questioned or challenged but if people argue, contradict, ignore or don't listen to what I explain, and when this will be detrimental to a casualty, I try not to offend but admit to being somewhat bossy. I confess to not having the same patience with people as I have for animals. I'm Grumpy Grandma Hedgehog!

Assessing callers, I find cat and horse owners, or sensible people with plenty of time and patience are often willing themselves to nurse hedgehogs that are not too ill or seriously injured, e.g. over wintering small ones. Severe cases are referred to their area wild life hospital or vet on a list provided by British Hedgehog Preservation Society. No guarantee that they will always be treated with the necessary expertise, respect and care. Some professionals regard hedgehogs as beneath their dignity. I wish they would understand that hedgehogs hurt and suffer just as much as prize cattle, race horses and show dogs. You have every right to make enquiries.

Since someone kindly donated my website 2 years ago, S.O.S. calls for further information have increased 100%. I might receive 60 calls a day with a multitude of problems and it intrigues me that whilst a lady in Greece willingly phoned 5 times for step by step D.I.Y. instructions, some miserable B in Scunthorpe complained bitterly about paying the cost of a phone call to Pet Taxi to give details of his address and directions for transport that I paid £48 for.

Thank goodness that while I'm stuck on the phone Stacey still comes mornings to help like a partner. It would be awful without her! At present I have about 50 intensive care patients all over the house which take hours before I start on the others. She does the feathered things in the orchard, the outside runs, the row of wooden places and the indoor Oliver Brown convalescent ward. We know every individual by name and each one is checked as they are fed and cleaned out. Stacey organises release, sorts out feed stocks and orders, and when I took a weekend off to celebrate my daughter's 50th birthday in London, she 'stayed over' and coped admirably with everything. She has cheerfully undertaken several talks and been very well received. She is even lending me her mother when she marries and honeymoons next summer. Together we see the funny side of hedgehogs breaking wind, poo artistically positioned in a food dish, a nose in curiosity snuffing and woffling from under a blanket, their attitude to room service and human slaves, the occasional indignant lunge when we invade their privacy, the absolute earthquake promptly created of a tidy cage, the gratified sucking of a hungry baby and the greedy ones who shove in to feed even before we've finished serving. They are delightful characters - everyone different.

Hedgehog dramas everyday 'involve cliff hangers, tragedies and thankfully some happy ever afters. I keep threatening to write a book but know there'll never be time as I'm too busy doing the job to write about it. I have re-issued The True Story of Oliver Brown the Hedgehog which was published years ago and since it was mentioned in BHPS newsletter I have sold hundreds (£3.50 includes postage and aids funds).

Hedgehog Care is dependent on donations and I am very grateful for support received from schools, churches, businesses, organisations, sales, individuals, children, memorials and Sheila Harland who still bravely fund raises throughout the year as she and her husband did together before he sadly died last

year. My pension couldn't possibly cover the cost of nursing sick and injured hedgehogs and I regularly think of the dear people now in Heaven who made provision for their care. God bless them.

Recently I was shocked to read RSPCA inspectors' instructions for wild life including hedgehogs. Euthanasia is recommended when a journey is involved, for orphans, sour smelling wounds, broken limbs and fly strike. Safely wrapped, hedgehogs are easily transported and I've had casualties delivered on horses and motor bikes, in buckets and handbags and stuffed down jumpers. And all those distress categories are what I'm here to deal with. I wrote to ask that RSPCA officers contact BHPS who will advise them of their area hedgehog carer. I wish everyone would do that, telephone 01584 890801 for BHPS - NOT the RSPCA.

BHPS has come a long way since the time when founder Major Coles hit the headlines by appealing to parliament for safety modification of death trap cattle grids. Consequently he seized the opportunity to set up a hedgehogabilia mail order business but did little to directly help hedgehogs other than milking publicity. Since his retirement, a new generation of experts and trustees have overhauled the charity to cover welfare, research, awareness, information and education. A Godsend to hedgehogs! I have just received their updated booklet "Care and Treatment of Sick and Injured Hedgehogs" revealing the latest medication and methods that every vet and carer should take on board.

St. Tiggywinkles in Buckinghamshire is the best and most caring wild life hospital in the world. The Stockers were my inspiration when they worked from their back garden before they flourished to incorporate the most lavish veterinary facilities, spacious enclosures, specialists in every species, highly trained staff, helpline, books by Les Stocker MBE and teaching courses. They are often on radio and T.V. and from my back garden I'm truly envious of their success and achievement.

Spikes World has sponsored Hedgehog Care since they first researched and formulated food for hedgehogs and my patients were given the privilege of testing. Now as well as stocking a range of hedgehog requisites with appropriate staff to help and advise, they quietly provide backing for untold hedgehog activities.

The rescue of hedgehogs from the Hebrides Isle of Uist goes on and Pat and John Holtham who live there host those awaiting their voyage to a welcome on the mainland. Whilst running her hedgehog hotel Pat finds time to make luxurious pockets, like tiny cushion covers for hedgehogs to snuggle into. They are fashioned from offcuts of fleece fabric offering comfort and reassurance to apprehensive patients and are quick and easy to wash and dry. It's a real pleasure to receive and unpack the colourful parcels that arrive here monthly with love and an update on Uist Hedgehog Rescue. Dedicated members of several animal charities have relocated about 230 this year.

Karen still dutifully manages Hogsfam and our annual Mrs. Tiggywinkles Weekend Washing Line Sale. I really appreciate the many hours she spends patiently sorting, hanging folding and displaying all the donated items.

Because so many of my dear supporters, friends and family have departed this world it has often worried me about what would become of my hedgehogs when the inevitable happens to me. To put my house in order is impossible because it always has been and always will be an eternal mess, but without a will the RSPCA could intervene and euthanase my patients and the government would seize their money. I have praised the hedgehog work of Rachel from Spalding Lincolnshire in previous reviews. She is now Hedgehog Care Spalding and still going from strength to strength. When she agreed to take my patients and everything movable, transferable and transportable when the time comes, I hobbled off to the solicitor and wrote my will. I am in good health and expect to last for many years yet but I came home with a spring in my step, lost a burden from my shoulders and ensured a safe future for my prickly dependants.

Please may I again remind people who write or donate to Hedgehog Care to always include a surname and address with correspondence and messages otherwise I can't acknowledge.

It's sad that hedgehogs have become a threatened species but heartwarming to know that there are so many people fighting in a variety of ways for their survival.

Your help and support is needed and appreciated. Thank you.

*Elaine*