

Autumn Orphan Hedgehogs What should you do?



Autumn orphans are those born late in the year, August and September. These hedgehogs do not have enough time to reach the weight necessary to ensure successful hibernation and if an underweight hedgehog goes into hibernation, it will die. These hedgehogs are therefore usually seen out during the day in a frantic effort to find more food. They eat anything they can find and are, hopefully,

found by caring people who want to help them.



The picture on the left, shows a healthy hedgehog ready for hibernation on the left and an Autumn orphan on the right. The Hedgehog on the left weighs around 700g and will definitely be fat enough to make it through the Winter. The hedgehog on the right weighs only 250g and would never have survived if he had not been found by a kind member of the public.

When these hedgehogs are brought in to us, they are usually suffering from gut infections, hypothermia and parasite infestations; most notably a condition called lungworm which is fatal if left untreated. Each hedgehog brought in therefore

will be put straight onto a week's course of antibiotics, followed by a three week course of lungworm treatment. Each will have their own heatpad until they are healthy and will be fed on both a wet and dried food diet to ensure rapid weight gain. As you can see, it is not simply a case of feeding them up and so no matter how cute they are, it is not advisable for members of the public to try and treat Autumn Orphans themselves.

There are however, a number of things that the public CAN do to help these orphans. If the hedgehog is coming out at night but is larger than a grapefruit, you can simply provide it with food each night until it is big enough to manage on its own. Chicken flavoured cat food or our own dried food blend will be fine.

However, ANY hedgehog out in the day needs help. You can pick up the hedgehog using gardening gloves or with an old towel and put it in a cardboard box or other suitable container. It will need an immediate source of heat such as a hot water bottle or a plastic milk bottle filled with warm water and wrapped in a towel. Putting it in a warm room is not enough. Please do not give hedgehogs milk, it can cause severe stomach upsets and can kill them. A dish of water will be fine together with a small amount of chicken flavoured cat food. You can then contact us or your nearest rescue centre for further information and advice.