

**RANGE:**

Africa. Other species are found in Europe and Asia. Most of the information comes from the European hedgehog since little is known about the African hedgehog.

**HABITAT:**

Wooded or cultivated land, tropical rain forest, steppe and desert.

**SIZE:**

Head/body length 4-6 inches.

**LIFE EXPECTANCY:**

Six to eight years.

**REPRODUCTION:**

Gestation period: 34-39 days. Litter size ranges from one to six with a mean average of three. At birth the young are pink and spineless. Immediately after birth the skin begins to shrink, causing the spines to emerge.

**DIET:**

**Wild:** Invertebrates: earthworms, beetles, earwigs, slugs, millipedes and caterpillars. In addition, they take eggs and young from birds' nests and will scavenge the remains of any animal found dead.

**Zoos:** Feline diet mixed with simlac and water. Mealworms occasionally.

**BEHAVIOR:**

Solitary animals except during breeding season.

**POINTS OF INTEREST:**

- The most distinctive feature of hedgehogs is their spines. An average adult carries about 5,000, each about an inch long, with a needle-sharp point. Spines are actually modified hair, and along the animal's sides where spines give way to true hair, thin spines or thick stiff hairs can often be found which may show the transition from one to the other. To minimize weight without losing strength, each spine is filled with many small air-filled chambers separated by thin plates.
- Connected to the base of each spine is a small muscle which is used to pull the spine erect. Normally the muscles are relaxed and the spines are laid flat along the back. If threatened, a hedgehog will often not immediately roll up, but will first simply erect the spines and wait for the danger to pass. When erected the spines stick out at a variety of different angles, a criss-crossing over one another and supporting each other to create a virtually impenetrable barrier. Hedgehogs are additionally protected by their ability to curl up into a ball.
- All hedgehogs are capable of undergoing periods of hibernation. Hibernation is dictated by the environmental conditions and is not a species trait.
- The hedgehog sleeps 18 hours a day! It starts to roam around 6:00 p.m. for two to three hours, again for two hours shortly after midnight, and an hour or so in the early morning.
- Is the hedgehog related to the porcupine? No, the hedgehog is an insectivore, related to moles and shrews, while the porcupine is a member of the rodent family. The porcupine is often wrongly referred to as a hedgehog. Both animals have sharp spines as protection, but otherwise are not similar.
- Hedgehogs figure prominently in folklore. Over 2,000 years ago, the Roman author, Pliny, recorded that hedgehogs carry fruit impaled on their spines rather than in their mouths, and this story has been handed down through the ages. The Chinese tell the same tale. Undoubtedly the spines of hedgehogs do occasionally catch and pick up things (usually dead leaves or twigs), and it is possible to impale soft fruit such as apples or grapes on the spines.
- Some people who have handled our hedgehogs have noticed an irritation to their skin. This might be caused by an unusual "self-anointing." This consists of licking substances until frothy saliva accumulates in the mouth, then raising the forelegs, turning the head, and with the tongue, placing the froth on the spines. The function of self-anointing is unknown, but suggestions include:

- 1) it may produce strong odors which act as a sexual attractant
- 2) It may reduce parasites on the skin
- 3) It may be an attempt to clean the spines or
- 4) It may make the spines distasteful and thus deter predators.



# Hedgehog, African

CONTINUED

## **STATUS:**

The most distinctive feature of hedgehogs is their spines. An average adult carries about 5,000, each about an inch long, with a needle-sharp point. Spines are actually modified hair, and along the animal's sides where spines give way to true hair, thin spines or thick stiff hairs can often be found which may show the transition from one to the other. To minimize weight without losing strength, each spine is filled with many small air-filled chambers separated by thin plates.