

Our association members are all volunteers who aim at conserving and protecting the habitat where the European hedgehog (*Erinaceus europæus*) lives in southern Switzerland.

We take care of the hedgehogs, which require medical treatment for various reasons or are in need. Our goal is to set them free once they are fit to be released, as they are wild mammals that are protected by law.

We also distribute information and make presentations in schools, from nursery to high school level, so as to increase public awareness.

Some of our members, who have previously been trained, run hedgehog parks or sanctuaries for those hedgehogs that have not reached the right weight to be released or hibernate in the wild. That is, they use part of their garden to build an enclosed space, which can accommodate a few hedgehogs. There is an important care center (hedgehog hospital) in Maggia, a village in one of the Ticino valleys, where the Association was founded in 2001.

We do not get any funds from the government and have to rely exclusively on membership fees and donations.

Our organization

We are a non-profit organization and are very decentralized. Several structures and about one thousand members compose it:

- Hedgehogs sanctuaries
- Hedgehogs sanctuaries for convalescence
- Pens for hedgehogs
- Sites for release
- Administration
- Active members
- Members
- Sponsors



Emblem of The Hedgehog Preservation Society located in Maggia, Canton of Ticino.



Alex Andina and Elsa Hofmann-Perini, managers of the Maggia hedgehog sanctuary.



Romina Perucchini, manager of the hedgehog sanctuary of Quartino.

Hedgehog sanctuaries

The hedgehog sanctuaries take care of injured and sick hedgehogs, mothers in trouble, orphans and newborns, some are born too late in the year and don't have the time to grow enough to survive the winter. A veterinary is called in whenever complex surgery is necessary or if we need advice.



The hedgehog sanctuary for convalescence in Broglio (upper Maggia Valley) managed by Mara Donati.

There are two hedgehog sanctuaries. The first one is in Maggia (12 km north of Locarno), in the Canton of Ticino in Switzerland, where the headquarters of the association are located and where the association was founded in 2001. The second hedgehog sanctuary, which was founded in 2006, is located in Quartino, a village between Locarno and Bellinzona, near Locarno Airport.

Hedgehog sanctuaries for convalescence

Hedgehog sanctuaries for convalescence are smaller, but can administer medicines and monitor the convalescence of the hedgehogs that have already been looked after in one of the two hedgehog sanctuaries. First aid can also be provided here.

We have two hedgehog sanctuaries for convalescence, one in Broglio, a village in the upper Maggia Valley, and a second one in Bellinzona.

Pens for hedgehogs

The owners of pens for hedgehogs shelter those animals, which have been taken care of and declared healthy by one of the sanctuaries. In spring, the hedgehogs that have survived hibernation are given a check-up and released in the area, where they were originally found if it is appropriate for their survival.

The number of the pens for hedgehogs varies continually, but we can always rely on about forty families, who have built a pen in their backyards.



An example of a pen for hedgehogs.



An example of a pen for release of hedgehogs. The two pens above look similar. The only difference is the use we make of it.

Sites for release

Not all the pens for hedgehogs are located in a place, which is suitable for their release. Therefore, we need special pens for this specific purpose. Since most of the hedgehogs we take care of have not learned how to survive in the wild, they need to be “trained” for freedom, that is, they need enclosures with an opening that allows them to run back and forth until they decide to leave permanently; they know they can find food and shelter in the enclosures. It can take them up to a month to learn to find shelters and to feed on insects, earthworms, snails and other small animals. Only after having reached this capability, they leave their pen for good, but may remain in the neighborhood. This is especially true for females and often they may be seen around.

Administration

Our administration service deals with several tasks: accounting, membership, request for financial help from sponsors, presentations in schools, management of our internet home page and information to our members.

Active Members

All our active members are volunteers, who undertake to do several jobs, such as taking care of the hedgehogs, of their pen, secretariat, presentations, public relations, etc.



The active member Gaby Mondini, a biologist, is giving many presentations especially in schools.

Members

Our members are people who support our association through their annual fee as individuals or families. Thanks to their help, we can pay for food, medicines, the veterinary, all the materials we need and cover the administrative costs.

Sponsors

They help us financially. They are private persons or foundations. With their help we can pay our employees' salaries and run our facilities. The government does not offer any help at all.



This was the first of well over 4500 hedgehogs that has been taken care of in our association. Her name was “Hedgehoglet” and when she was found on November 20th, 2001, she weighed only 300 grams, too little to survive the winter.



This was the first pen at the main sanctuary that was taken as a model for many pens of our active members.



One of the two new pens at the sanctuary in Maggia. It was erected at the same place of the first one (see above).

History

The hedgehog sanctuary of Maggia opened on November 20th, 2001; it is also home to our active members Elsa Hofmann-Perini and Alex Andina.

On a cold evening near the end of November 2001, a hedgehog weighing only 300 grams was found in their backyard, outside the kitchen. It was searching for the little food their dogs and cats may have left in the bowls. Such a small hedgehog, so late in the year, would not have survived the winter. It could have either been helped or been abandoned to its destiny. Our founders decided to help it.

Armando Besomi, the late president of the Society for the Protection of Animals (SPA) of Bellinzona, suggested to Elsa and Alex to become their experts for hedgehogs. The board of the SPA decided immediately to integrate in the SPA the hedgehog sanctuary of Maggia. There, all those small animals could be taken care of and eventually be released in the place where they had been found once they would have fully recovered. That decision was easy to take, but performing that task, however, turned out to be much more demanding.

First of all, we had to obtain government permission for looking after such wild animals, which were protected by law. Although Elsa, medical nurse by profession, had already had such an experience in another canton ten years

earlier, the health of the first hedgehog did not show any improvement. Elsa and Alex decided to take a training course for the care of such animals with the Swiss umbrella association "Pro Igel" (pro hedgehog) in the Canton of Zurich.

Our professional knowledge was constantly improved and updated, but the facilities turned out to be insufficient and were not able to respond to the new and continuous requirements. An indoor cage for the care of these animals (infirmary) and an outside pen for hedgehogs during the recovery phase were necessary.



Alex Andina

Above a newborn hedgehog. Hedgehogs are born with their spines, which are wrapped in a membrane to protect the mother during delivery and are quite soft at first. The mother then promptly takes the membrane off.

The first indoor cage could host up to 6 hedgehogs or many more cubs. It was easily accessible and allowed us, and still does, to work efficiently and quickly. The same is true for the outside pen, where hedgehogs were able to recover fast. Eventually a second cage was added to the infirmary.

Below a baby being bottle-fed by Elsa. Today we don't use any longer bottle-feeding but a syringe instead, which turned out to be easier and more controllable.



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During its first year the hedgehog sanctuary of Maggia took care of 80 hedgehogs from all over the Canton of Ticino, from the Italian speaking part of the Canton of

Grigioni and even from the rest of Switzerland. On their arrival, the hedgehogs were weak, sick, injured or orphans. The following year the number of “guests” doubled.

Things developed fast and in 2008 we hosted more than 300 hedgehogs; the SPA Bellinzona could no longer cover our costs, as they have to take care of a large number of animals. That's why the Hedgehog Preservation Society was founded on July 5th, 2008 and we parted from the SPA of Bellinzona, even though we are still cooperating of course. From then on the association “The Hedgehog Preservation Society” has become completely independent, not only from the practical standpoint, but also financially.

The Maggia sanctuary had to be thoroughly restructured. The number of hedgehogs reached a maximum of 466 units in 2011. From then on, the number started decreasing

because of the destruction of the hedgehog's habitat and the wide use of poisons, such as insecticides, artificial fertilizers and others, and the growing use of brush cutters, which cause dreadful injuries. On the other hand, taking care of hedgehogs has become much more complex and more time-consuming because new diseases have appeared and they require more care.

The Hedgehog



Be careful: brush cutters can be very dangerous. They can cause terrible injuries to hedgehogs. Every year we have to deal with way too many such cases.

The hedgehogs are nocturnal mammals of the order of the insectivores and are present in Europe and western Asia. They have been in existence for 15 million years and belong to the most ancestral order of mammals. In fact, the insectivores were already existing at the time of the dinosaurs. All mammals developed from those primeval insectivores, including the modern insectivores such as the hedgehog.

The hedgehogs feed on snails, earthworms, insects and other small animals. Occasionally their diet includes also mice and small snakes. For backyard and garden lovers hedgehogs are the best allies. Unfortunately, however, they are an endangered species.

While they are looking for food or for a partner at

night they often get run over. According to a survey carried out in Denmark in the year 2000, about 120,000 hedgehogs got killed by cars, without taking into account those, which were just injured and somehow found shelter under a bush to eventually die in agony anyway. Here in Switzerland, which has twice as many inhabitants and is twice

the size of Denmark, the situation is much worse. At dawn the hedgehogs go to sleep, but we humans are causing them a hard life or, better said, a difficult sleep, not only with the noise of road traffic, but also with leaf blowers, let alone brush cutters, or by burning hedges. All these things kill hedgehogs or cause horrific injuries, which eventually lead to a very painful death; it's heart-wrenching to watch them die if they do not get medical treatment.



Hedgehogs prefer tall grass and shrubs with many leaves and old wood, where they can find shelter and food, such as insects, earthworms and snails.

A hedgehog needs a diversified environment that offers many possibilities and varieties of food. Today's countryside with its monocultures doesn't offer a suitable food supply any more. Therefore, hedgehogs have to get nearer to human beings and their abodes, where they often get entangled in dangerous fences or nets, fall into swimming pools and drown or simply don't find any food because we tend to "overclean" our backyards and gardens.



This mother has been knocked down by a car and got a concussion. In spite of having intensively taken care of her, she could hold on to her pregnancy and she gave birth to seven cubs. Mother and cubs were released two months later in the location where she has been found. Colors on her back have been applied as a recognition mark.

Hedgehogs like leaves, old wood, bushes and tall grass, where they can find enough food and material to build their nest. They hibernate during the winter, but to be able to do so, they must put up sufficient body fat. A hedgehog below 700 – 800 grams has little possibilities to survive the winter. In the fall people can help them, by putting dog and cat food in their backyards. A bowl plenty of fresh water is important also in the summer. Contrary to common belief cow milk contains too much lactose, which causes



This hedgehog has been given to us weak and almost dying. We could save him and release him into his natural habitat.

them heavy diarrhea and may lead to death.

While in captivity, hedgehogs are fed on cat food. Once a week, their menu may also include scrambled eggs, minced meat (when possible, not pork) a little corn oil, obviously without any salt. Tap water is the favorite drink but it must be changed at least once a day.

Hedgehogs held in captivity need a cage area of at least 1 m² but to move around outside they should have at least 6 m². Inside this fence, crate or cage place a box where they can find shelter. It should measure about 30 by 20 cm and be filled with torn newspaper and have an opening of 10 by 10 cm. The hedgehog will use it as its nest and use the torn newspaper to build it. Newspapers are put at the bottom of the cage because they ease up the daily cleaning. The temperature must be around 20°C (room temperature).

By leaving in your own backyard a secluded wild spot, you'll offer hedgehogs a chance to survive and you will be happy to discover that they will keep your backyard and garden free from a lot of pests; you won't need to use any herbicides or insecticides, which endanger our lives, too.



For any enquiries or request of help call the Hedgehog Preservation Society between 10:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m. MET or send an e-mail at the following address: info@ricci-in-difficolta.ch.

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