



IHA NEWS



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PROMOTING HEDGEHOG EDUCATION, RESEARCH, REGISTRATION & RESCUE WORLDWIDE

WITH FRIENDS LIKE THESE...

I Don't Need Any Enemies. (Hedgehogs As Classroom Pets)

By Z. G. Standing Bear

Before howls of indignation rise up, let me hasten to begin by saying that I know of many hedgehogs exposed to school classroom settings that are happy, safe and sound. Whew! Now that that's out of the way, I shall now roll on to cover some horror stories and wave large flags of caution for those considering admitting our little friends in to share the classroom experience.

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Everyone's Responsibility is No One's Responsibility

Often teachers treat classroom "pets" as a learning experience. This noble aim teaches responsibility for other lives, as well as proper care and maintenance. However, if responsibility is not firmly and fairly (rotated around and accounted for) fixed, then the animals are bound to be neglected, some students may bear an extra work load, and in the worst case scenario, no one will do anything until neglect is obvious. Such was the case in a high school science classroom where responsibility was not fixed for the care of two hedgehogs living together in a 20 gallon glass aquarium. The pair, thought to be a male and a female, were found burrowed in dirty wood chips amidst contaminated food and an overturned and inoperative hamster wheel. The hedgehogs, which I discovered were both female, were mite infested and losing quills (one was almost bald) and had open festering sores. The teacher, upon being shown the condition of the hedgehogs, permitted me to take them for medical care. Their recovery took several months and by the time they were restored to health, Petrie and Mattie had been forgotten about and lived out their lives at our Rescue.

As may be seen, even in a science classroom, inadequate cage size, improper bedding materials (I've seen cedar chips used in several classrooms), and inappropriate exercise devices are frequently employed to the detriment of the hedgehog(s) living there. These problems are compounded by the spate of bad literature out there on pet hedgehog

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IHA NEWS

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IHA News

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Our Goal: To promote and improve the care and quality of hedgehogs by means of education and exhibition

The Royal Quill



I have really loved getting to be the first hedgehog to spy on what is going to be in the Newsletter. These humans concoct up the most interesting reading! Pat Storm is at it again with another of her revised winter weather articles. Well, that's scary stuff and all joking aside, I'll have to say that Pat's on top of it, or maybe underneath it. Now, do you think Pat could leave well enough alone by rousting about in the snowdrifts? No, not at all. She's also purporting to let y'all in on the "secret life" of the hedgehog. Well, good luck to you all. But you've got about 50 million years to catch up on.

Deb Weavers article about "deep" (my quotes) psychology as to why you humans form a strong human-hedgehog bond seeks to explain why, perhaps, humans have an affinity for hedgehogs. Standing Bear produced an article on hedgehogs as (gasp!) classroom pets. I think he covered all of the bases, but he did get a LOT of help from Pat Storm, whose suggestions probably added another 500 words of text. Classrooms are scary places for us, unless there is a kind and careful teacher that keeps us out of harms way.

Approaching the Winter of my existence, I am closing out my earthly journey now. My most recent years here have been a gentle joy. I wish to all of you a life, especially a later life, filled with joy and introspection, for introspection is where "it all" makes sense - eventually. Those humans of North America that call themselves "Blackfoot" are symbolically saying that they are the people that walk in introspection. "Black" for the color of the West where the sun goes down and when the sun leaves all is in darkness (just like we hedgehogs like it!). "Foot" for the symbol of walking. When the sun goes down one is left to contemplate within, for your external eyes can no longer "see." My earthly age is gaining upon me now, and so I wish all of my friends a fond farewell.

I am resigning my position as the Hedgehog Monarch of North America. I shall be the first monarch to "retire." The next edition of the IHA News shall have a new monarch in place. IHA Permanent Grand Champions are encouraged to apply (but it is a grave responsibility), for they have seniority. If no Permanent Grand Champion applies, then the Crown shall fall to the next senior Minister.

My best wishes to all of you, and I remain, your most humble servant,

HRH King Tiggiewinkle I
Hedgehog Monarch of North America

Disclaimer:

IHA is not responsible for injury or illness due to advice given in the articles written by various authors, nor is it responsible for what individuals have written.

That Special Someone

By Deb Weaver

We've all had that special companion, that animal that quietly enters our life and takes over before we know what's happened. If we're lucky, it happens more than once. For me "that animal" has been hedgehogs, and I've had five that have run my life for quite some time now. The interesting thing is I don't mind at all. Pour yourself a cup of your favorite libation and let me tell you about the Weaver kids.



Gracie The Diva. "She called all the shots"

Gracie (from Mischief in the Garden) was my first. To sum her up would be to share her nickname with you, "Gracie The Diva." She called all the shots; telling me when it was time to snuggle (very rarely), when it was time for her to run in her ball (she spent hours running in her ball, banging off of everything I own), and when it was time to be left alone in her pigloo (she'd walk in to her pigloo and with a back foot stuff the opening with a blankie quicker than I can slam a door. The message couldn't have been clearer.). She was a tough little girl, and gave intestinal cancer a good run for its money for as long as she could before dying just past two years of age. I learned so much from her, my first kid, and I often think I could have been a better mom to her.

Grover (also Mischief in the Garden) came in to my life next. It's no secret to those that know me well, he was (actually, still is) the love of my life. He came to me at six weeks after his Mom gave him the boot out of the nest box (shared with his three sisters). I was so lucky with him, I was able to handle him from 3 weeks on (his Mom Violet was a very laid back, and good, Mom). He was a snuggler from day one, and I loved every minute of our snuggle time. He was quite the athlete when he was young, pounding his wheel nightly and winning IHOG ribbons at events. Then came a hormone surge at 10 months that his little body just couldn't handle (i.e., the teenage years). After his "unfortunate accident" (i.e., neutering) he felt better and his behavior returned to the loving, caring level it had been. I always felt Grover was an "old soul," wise beyond his years, always willing to lend a paw to anyone in need. He grew to be a big boy tipping the scales at 1300 grams. Whenever we were out and about his size always raised an eyebrow or two and he entertained many requests from folks at shows to be held and snuggled. He died just one week before his fourth birthday, and is still missed daily.



Grover "He was a snuggler from day one..."

Gabby (Mischief in the Garden) came to live with Grover and I when Grover was around 1 1/2 years old. She was his niece, and since he was neutered, they lived together in the same condo after being in separate condos for a few weeks. Gabby was a sweet girl, who loved living alone when she was little (she'd had two very pushy brothers). When I'd reach in to her sleepy box to get her she'd growl so hard her entire box would vibrate. The night she and Grover met nose-to-nose was entertaining. I had them both in a large play pen. They sat at opposite corners and looked at each other. Finally Gabby went over to explore Grover. After a few minutes he decided to retreat, and dug under the liners and hid. Gabby ran around the play pen exploring all the toys and tubes and using Grover as a big speed bump, running over him numerous times. Finally he came



Gabby. "...she'd growl so hard her entire box would shake"

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to the edge and poked his head out as if to say “hey, you coming or not?” Gabby went over and followed him down under the liners and within a few minutes they were napping side by side. Gabby crossed way too soon, not even making it to two years old. Grover mourned Gabby’s passing for some months (as did I). And then Molly came in to our lives.



Molly’s high energy level wore Grover out.

Veronica Moyle (Hedge Hogging Around) told me she had two young girls we could choose from. Grover and I were on the road by 7:30 AM one Saturday for a 2 ½ hour drive to meet up with Veronica at her friend’s home, which was halfway between our homes. It happened to be the first day of deer/gun season here in Wisconsin, and being that the meeting place was out in the middle of the country, I kept one eye on the road, one eye out for hunters, and one eye out for deer! Veronica had two ladies for us to choose from. One a 2 month old girl and one a 4 month old. I held the 2 month old first, she was a pretty girl, but was having a very crabby day. After a few minutes I moved on to the 4 month old. She was very sweet and calm and active. After a few minutes we introduced her to Grover in a corral. Grover, usually very sweet, was a grump during this first meeting. He pretty much sat in the middle of the corral with his quills at half mast and huffed at wee Molly who was busy exploring everything - - including the big quilly mountain. They spent about 40 minutes together, with no aggression or problems, so she became a Weaver right there and then. I’m pretty sure Grover thought one of his beanie babies had come to life - - at under 300 grams Molly is a wee girlie (compared to Grover’s 1300). They became fast friends, but I housed them separately - - Molly’s high energy level wore Grover out. Nightly time together on the sofa was spent running through piles of blankies playing hide and seek (or in some cases Jumping Off The Big Mountain, can you guess who was the mountain and who did the jumping?). When Grover had enough, he’d wait until she wandered in to the snuggle sack and then go over and “accidentally” lay on the opening so she couldn’t exit. In case you were wondering, a 300 gram individual can not push a 1300 gram individual out of the way!

Today Molly is a 700 gram sweetie pie, who loves to sit at the back of her PVC tube where Mom can’t reach her. She never raises her quills, loves to visit the vet (well love may be a stretch, but gas never has to be used - - our last visit she allowed the vet to put her fingers in her mouth), and has never bitten. She does however have the need to be in constant motion! A challenge to nail cutting let me tell you (again, she doesn’t care a bit that her nails are being cut). Her nickname is Molly Dolly Snickerdoodles Sassy Pants - - but I’m thinking of changing the Sassy Pants (a hold over from her younger days) to Sweet Girl. Molly is a co-founder of the Molly Girl Club. She’ll turn three in July and she’s looking forward to her fourth birthday so she can become a member of the Red Hat Club.



Greta the Growler

My fifth hedgie Greta (her nickname is Greta the Growler - - do I need to say much more?) joined us this past July from Ain’t No Creek Ranch. She prefers to play in her large condo without interruptions from her housemates. She and Molly, while not violent with each other, seem to still be working out boundary issues and because of this each lives in their own condo. If they are nose to nose huffing and shoving occurs. Nightly family sofa time is accomplished in layers. A pad, Molly, a large blankie layer, Greta, topped by another large blankie layer. Kind of like layering a cake I guess. The girls will snuggle together some nights and even play with each other - - but that layer of blankie must always be there. Some days Greta even consents to snuggle in a blankie with her Mom and plays peek-a-boo.

Each day with these wonderful creatures is a blessing. I certainly look forward to tomorrow and whatever the girls have planned.

Secret Life of a Hedgehog

By Pat Storm

9:30 PM. Yawn, stretch, wake up. Scratch, stretch and yawn again. Peeks out of the sleepy sack. "Hmmm, yawn, it looks like it is getting dark. Time to get up." Stretch, scratch. "Think I will go grab a quick bite. I wonder what is on the menu tonight. Oh, look, live mealies tonight! Ymmmm. And what is this green stuff over here?" Sniff. "Smells odd. Tastes odd, ewwww. What do they think, I'm a rabbit? Maybe I should try it again. Nope, can't handle that. I guess I will show them what I think about that." Poops on the green beans. "Now for a little kibble, yummmm. A little sip of my water and then off for my run."

10:30 PM Running on wheel. "I am on my way now! Look at me. I am running on the African savannah. Isn't it beautiful? Ah, I see elephants, I see zebras, oops, I see hyena, better run a little faster. This is so exhilarating."

11:25: Running on wheel. "Geez, gotta poop, but don't want to stop running. Ooops, there it goes. Oh well, it is behind me now. I surely don't need to worry about it."

11:30 PM Still running on the wheel. "Oooops, what was that? Ewww, it was squishy." Stops and looks at his foot, takes a sniff. "Hmmm, I must be running in the tracks of another hedgehog. Ewww, you would think he would have the decency to poop off the side of the trail! Oh well, places to go, things to see." Starts running again.

12:30 AM On the wheel. "Hmmm getting a little hungry here. Haven't found a single bug here on the trail. That other hedgehog must have gotten them all. Oh well, I know I have a bowl of kibble over in the corner." Gets off the wheel and goes to the bowl. "I often wonder, how does this bowl keep getting full all the time. I sit here, eat most of it up, and it is always full the next day. And that treat bowl, it never has enough stuff in it. I wonder if there is a way to get that fixed." Chomps down some food, wanders around his cage. Finds a tp tube. "Hey, what's this thing? Oh yeah, I remember, I had one of those a while back." Stuffs his head in one end. "Oh yeah, I forgot how much fun this was." Starts wandering around the cage with the tp tube on his head, bumping into everything.

1:30 AM Still playing with the tp tube. Wow, this is so much fun. Things really look so different from inside of here. I think I need a drink. I wonder if I can get a drink without taking this off my head?" Walks to the water bowl and puts the end of the tube in the water. "Nope, can't reach it." Rolls in a ball to dislodge the tube and gets a drink of water. Looks at the wet end of the tube." Hmmm, how did that happen? I couldn't reach the water! How did that get wet? Oh well, gotta get back on the run." Jumps back on the wheel and starts running.

2:30 AM Running as fast as he can. "Here I am, running faster than all the other critters out there. I am just too quick for anyone to catch me. Look at that, I just passed a cheetah! Maybe I should leave him a poop to slip on, haha." Poops on the run, speeds it up and the poop falls on his head. "I guess that was not a good idea. I think that cheetah was mad and threw that poop at me. Now I have a poopy foot and a poopy head. This could be trouble. I suspect there will be a bath sometime in my future. Maybe I can out run it." Continues to run, and places a few more poops on the wheel, things are getting a little thicker as the night progresses.

5:30 AM Still running on the wheel. "Whew, getting a little tired. It has been quite a night. I think it is time for another bite and drink." Walks to bowl, eats more crunchies, goes and gets a drink and spots the tube, again. "Oh yeah, I forgot I was doing that. It is still a little wet, but that shouldn't matter. I will just stick my head in the dry end." Puts tp tube on his head once again. "I wonder if I can eat with this thing on." Gives

it a try. "Nope, can't do that. Let's see what I can do with it." Starts wandering around his cage, again. Stumbles upon a lattice ball with bell. "Hey, it looks like that will fit." Scoops up the ball. "Yeah, it does, it does! This is fun. OH, got an idea." Walks to his wheel wearing his tube. "I bet it would be fun to run the trail with this on my head." After a few attempts to mount the wheel, he succeeds. "Oh wow, a whole new view." Drops a couple more poops in the run. Steps in them, but ignores them.

6:30 AM Still wheeling with tube on head. "Uh oh, it looks like it is getting light out. Time to hit the hay" Jumps out of the wheel, balls up to get out of the tube. "Yawn, yeah, it looks like time to get my beauty sleep." Walks over to check bowls, no new treats. A little crunch left over, takes a bite. "Well, I better fluff up my sleepy bag. Hey, got an idea, why don't I take my tube to bed with me?" Places tube on his head and heads for his sack. With some tricky maneuvers he gets himself and most of the tube in the sack with his stuffed toy. "It is a little crowded. But I can't kick out my buddy. And I like my tube and want to be sure no one steals it. I guess I can make this work." With a little wiggling around he gets comfy and starts to snooze.

8:30 AM Still sleeping. His caretaker comes and takes a peek at him and gets a chuckle out of the sight of seeing him sleeping with the tube on his head.

9:30 AM Still sleeping. His caretaker comes to clean his cage and wash his yucky wheel. She carefully removes him in his sleepy sack, he moves a little, but does not awaken. His caretaker cleans out his cage, fills his bowl with fresh kibble, and changes his water. She quietly slips his sleepy bag back in the clean cage and allows him to sleep the day away.

2:00 PM He wakes, and wonders why this stupid tube is on his head. He pushes it off, but keeps it in the bag. He decides to check out his treat bowl and get a drink. "No treats yet? What's up with that? I see there is new food!" Takes a sip of water, looks around his cage, and crawls back into his sack to get some sleep.

4:00 PM Still asleep, his caretaker comes to his cage and calls his name. He stirs a little but continues to dream about the savannah. She calls his name again, this time he hears her, yawns and peeks out of his sleepy sack. She says "Hey sleepyhead, wake up. Time to come out and play for a while and let me give you a clean sleepy sack." She gently picks him up in his sack and pulls him out. "You silly boy, what is your tube doing in your bed with you?" She pulls out the tube and stuffed animal toy. "How come your tube is all wet? I guess I have to go find you a new one of those, too." Carrying him across the room she picks up a clean sleepy bag and tp tube. She carries them all back to the cage, places the sack, tube and stuffed animal toy in the cage and proceeds to take him out for some play time.

4:30 PM After a few minutes of play, his caretaker notices the poopy boots and the splat on his head. "What is this on your head? And poopy boots, too? I think it is bath time for you, young man." He flinches. "I was afraid she would say that!"

5:00 PM In the tub. "No, no, I'm gonna drown!!! Let me outta here" As he struggles to escape from the tub, his caretaker laughs at him "You are just so silly. I should think it would feel good to get those poopy boots off and especially the mess on the top of your head." "Oh no, not the top of my head, I will drown for sure." Trying to crawl up his caretaker's arm. His caretaker keeps putting him back in the water, he coughs and sputters and continues to try and climb up her arm. "If you will just be still, this will be over in no time". "Be still? I will surely drown!" At last the bath is over. His caretaker wraps him in a nice warm towel and starts to give him a bit of a massage. "Ah, at least it is worth a bath to get this treatment." After a little snuggling his caretaker pulls out a hair dryer and sets it on low and turns it on. "What's that?" She unwraps the towel and points the dryer at him. "Ooooooh, how nice and warm. That feels good. Oh, I could learn to love this!" After a few minutes he is dry and his caretaker turns off the dryer. "What, done already? I was just getting really enjoy that" "There, all nice and clean, and dry. Now we can go play til supper.

6:00 PM His caretaker puts him back in his cage. He walks around and looks at the “mess”. “ I guess I have to get things back in order, again. You would think by now she would know how I like things! I guess humans are hard to train.” He starts putting his things where he wants them. Moves his wheel over about 1/2 an inch, looks at it and decides it needs to be moved just a little farther. “Bobo? What are you doing out of the sack? She never puts you back where you belong.” He picks up his stuffed animal toy and places him back in his sack. “Yawn. Wonder if there are any treats yet?” Checks his bowl. “Nope, not yet. What the heck?” Walks to his wheel, takes a turn or two on it. “Not in the mood to do this now. Think I need a nap.” Goes to his sleepy bag and crawls in to take a nap. “Bobo, you are so soft and cuddly. I sure don’t know what I would do without you.” A gentle snore is now heard.

7:30 PM Still sleeping. His caretaker comes back and lifts him and his sack out of the cage. “Okay, wake up, time to play.” She takes him out of his sack and places him on the floor. She lies down next to him. “Oh boy, exploring time!” He runs around the room, poking his nose or head into various things. He finds a magazine lying on the floor. He takes a sniff, then a lick. “HmMMMM, interesting” and starts to self anoint. His caretaker calls to him, but he ignores her. “I’m too busy right now, things to do, places to go, you know.” He leaves the magazine and goes to pester the furry thing that is purring in the corner. The furry thing gives him a sniff and decides to go else where. “That is the most unsocial thing.” He continues to explore checking out everything like he has never seen it before. “Oh, what’s this?” He crawls into a paper bag, His caretaker calls to him “Hey, you want some treats?” His ears perk up and now he has decided to pay attention. He pokes his head out from under a chair. His caretaker offers him a dried cricket. “Mmmm, these are pretty good. Yes, I will have another, and another. YmMMM. More? Hey, where are you going? I want more.” His caretaker comes back to play with him some more, he explores a little more.

9:00 PM His caretaker goes looking for him, calling him and finds him snuggling in the corner with a piece of fleece. “Aw, poor baby, all tired out? I guess it is time to put you to bed. I have homework to finish before I can go to bed. I’d let you out a little longer, but I don’t want you to disappear and can’t find you when I need to go to bed.” She scoops him up and puts him in his cage. He walks over, looks in his treat bowl, still empty, gets a drink of water and crawls back into his sleepy sack. “Goodnight my sweet little boy.” “Yeah, right, where are my treats. They better be in there when I wake up for the night.” He drifts off to sleep. While he is asleep his caretaker puts his treats in his bowl. This time he gets apple sauce and silk worms. Boy, will he be surprised.

9:30 PM And it all starts all over again.

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Cold Weather Plans, Revisited

By Pat Storm

Well, after the storm in October, I decided I had better get set for the rest of the winter.

After hearing how hard Colorado had been hit, I gave in and bought another generator. This time I did not go to the expense of getting one large enough to run the whole house. I was lucky to find a good sized one for only \$200 and decided to go for it. It is hooked up and I found it runs a lot more of the house than I would have expected. I will be without TV, computer, and the other non essentials, but it runs the furnace, fridge and a few lights without putting any strain on the generator. Keeping us all warm is my main objective. Even the fridge is not important since I have a closed in porch that is cold enough to be a fridge temporarily.

So plan A is back in place. I learned my lesson in October; more than one plan is needed. Since warmth is my primary concern, plan B dealt only with that issue. Shopping around I found that Mr. Heater makes several propane heaters that are safe for heating cabins and fishing shacks. After a lot of reading and assurance from dealers, I invested in one of these heaters. My hope is never to need to fall back on it.

Mr. Heater makes a few different sizes. Since my house is small, I opted on one of the smaller models. Sleeping in the hedge room was not a problem before, so if it comes down to all of us piling into one room again, I know we can do just that. I will still need to hope that the house itself doesn't get cold enough to have to worry about freezing pipes. The Blizzard of '77 put me in that situation. Luckily I had no hedgies at that time, but did have a 4 year old to worry about. But that is a whole different, long, story.

Now, plan C is to evacuate. It was plan B before, but with the storm we had, we were ALL in the same boat in this immediate area (it actually covered several counties). My daughter was my fall back plan, but she had no electricity either. Luckily, she got her electricity back sooner than I did. She lives across the street from the fire hall, so they were up and running quicker than most of the city and towns in the area. She was still an option later in that storm period. She is only a matter of a few miles away, so the drive would have only been tempered by fallen trees and power poles. By the time evacuation would have been the best option most of the fallen obstacle mess was cleared from the main roads I would have needed to get to her house. She and I are on a couple of the busier roads in the county, and we are connected with main roads, so getting to one or the other house is not a problem to take into consideration, except in very extreme conditions.

So. Here it is winter again. Plan A, B and C are in place. I hope I don't need to use any of them. I also hope this is my last winter in this kind of weather. But seeing what has been happening, all over the country this winter at least plan A and B will be going with me wherever I decide to settle in for my retirement years. Plan C will need to be formulated once I settle in. And then, plans may need to be revised for the situations of the area. All parts of this country have their own special needs and disasters.

I hope everyone keeps safe and warm this winter, and in the future. Planning is important, but remember

one plan may NOT be enough. Our hedgegies are so sensitive to temperature changes we need to be a little more prepared than others. Napping with a hedgehog or two, occasionally, is fun. But rotating several overnight to keep them all warm as a matter of life or death is a bit more of a challenge. We were lucky with the October storm that the temperature was not a huge factor.

Today, I look out at a horrible storm. The snow is falling so heavily I cannot see the street. It doesn't appear to be a problem storm, just the usual type of snow so well known in this part of the country, but the temperature is frigid. We are lucky there is no wind, or this could have been considered blizzard conditions. If we had these temperatures in October, I am afraid things would have been drastically different in my last story.

Class pets, continued from 1

care, especially books written by authors who have failed to do adequate research. Even though some of these harmful books are now out of print, the presence of the Internet has given these books new life through auction sites such as eBay and online booksellers, such as Abebooks. Unfortunately, most people have great faith in books, but in some of these mainstream publications on the care of pet hedgehogs, it is likely you will kill the animal in just a few months through bad diet and/or an unsafe environment.

Temperature

Many animals kept in classrooms can easily weather the temperature variations that occur there, and so it does not occur to many teachers that room temperature is a serious health issue for African hedgehogs. Although the classroom temperature may be adequate for African hedgehogs (at 72 degrees Fahrenheit or higher) during the school day, the room temperature throughout the night is often another matter. School officials are constantly concerned with budgetary matters and heating fuel costs are high on the list for attention. In speaking with a teacher recently about a classroom pet hedgehog she had inherited from another teacher no longer with the school, I was informed that the hedgehog lived in the classroom permanently (even through the weekends) although the temperature of the school was lowered to 50 degrees overnight. It is small wonder that the hedgehog was lethargic and seemed ill. It is quite amazing that the hedgehog was still alive.

Also, even if some arrangements are made to accommodate a hedgehog's environment overnight with supplementary heating (such as a space heater or an arrangement where the classroom thermostat can be independently set), power outages can occur and possibly go unnoticed in an unoccupied school building.

Circadian Rhythm

As most of us familiar with hedgehogs know, our little friends are regarded as "nocturnal" animals, preferring nighttime activity to the daylight. This poses a dilemma for the hedgehog's role as a classroom pet since the hedgehog prefers to sleep during the day. The constant activity and noise in the classroom during the day often upsets the hedgehog, who is just trying to get a good day's sleep. At night, when the hedgehog is active, all of the students are gone. This conflict, in and of itself, presents discouraging news for the use of a hedgehog as a classroom pet.

The Ignorant

Well meaning, but ignorant individuals may cause a hedgehog harm simply because they do not understand how hedgehogs may react to handling. This problem is compounded as the number of individuals interacting with a hedgehog increases (such as a whole classroom full of students). The

eyesight of a hedgehog is quite poor and they rely upon their sense of smell very heavily. New scents from numerous humans handling them may cause them to bolt and fall. Although hedgehogs can fall considerable distances without injury, injuries from falling are not uncommon.

In some circumstances, a student may drop a hedgehog if the hedgehog is suddenly startled by something the student does which causes the hedgehog to react. These reactions may include suddenly rolling up into a protective ball of quills or biting the handler due to a new scent. Detailed instruction of how to handle a hedgehog should be given by someone who knows what s/he is talking about. The younger the student group, the more difficult it is to have proper handling techniques explained.

Terrorists

Mishandling hedgehogs out of ignorance is one thing, but deliberate abuse should also be a matter of concern. Unfortunately, there are people, students included, that derive pleasure from abusing animals. Such was the case for Rosie (see Rosie's story on our Rescue's web site at <http://hedgieflash.org>),



Rosie, blinded in one eye at a hedgehog mill, unfortunately served as a golf ball while a classroom pet.

a small hedgehog that had a rough life before entering our Rescue. Losing an eye at a breeding "mill," Rosie was donated to a school teacher by a pet store that could not sell her (probably due to the missing eye). During a school recess where most of the students and teachers were outdoors on the school playground, two boys busied themselves in Rosie's classroom by using her as a golf ball. They batted Rosie around the room using the teacher's umbrella as a golf club and a sideways-turned waste basket as a target. Discovery by another student who told the teacher brought a stop to the activity, punishment for the boys, and the permanent exit of Rosie from the classroom.

I have heard from several teachers that classroom security is an important part of their daily routine. I was informed that unless a teacher is present, the classroom is locked and no one is permitted inside. Given Rosie's experiences, this seems like a good idea.

Hand Cleaning, Allergies, and Alleged Allergies

Stressing cleanliness is always a good idea, so why not insist upon it when dealing with classroom pets? It may be prudent to require those handling a hedgehog and a hedgehog's environment to wash the hands before and after the activity. This would be for the protection of not only the student, but the hedgehog as well. If hands are cleaned with a non-scented soap, the chance of a hedgehog finding someone's hand interesting to chomp down upon is greatly diminished.

Although hedgehogs are known for not triggering allergic reactions in people normally allergic to other fur-bearing animals, there are exceptions. I know of one teacher that requires a release signed by parents to give permission for their child to interact in any way with a classroom pet. In this release the issue of possible allergies are covered. It is also prudent to keep in mind that any untoward health issue in a student may get blamed on the hedgehog - which brings us to the next unpleasant topic.

Sue 'Em!

In today's litigious society where people are likely to sue for anything that may look tempting for a monetary reward, it is a wonder teachers opt for any sort of enrichment in the classroom. The most risky part of having a hedgehog interact with humans is the possibility of biting. Although only a small percentage of hedgehogs are regarded as "biters," a far wider percentage may bite as certain circumstances

permit (such as an intriguing scent or if the hedgehog is tired or not feeling well).

Hedgehog bites that break the skin of the bitee raise a new dimension of possible health and legal problems. Not only may there be legal complications, but a fear of the transmission of rabies may rear its head. No matter that no case of rabies has ever been detected in a captive hedgehog and only one case has been reported in wild hedgehogs (in Budapest, Hungary). Since there is no rabies vaccine for hedgehogs, a skin-breaking bite may mean a death sentence for the hedgehog, or even death sentences for a number of hedgehogs if the student delays in making a bite known and if there are multiple hedgehogs present. For this reason, several hedgehog caretakers have stopped doing public education programs with hedgehogs. In our own public education programs conducted by The Flash and Thelma Memorial Hedgehog Rescue, we permit audience members to only pet a hedgehog on the back while being held by myself or one of our staff members. At no time do we allow anyone to place hands or fingers near the mouth of a hedgehog.

The Administration (Hedgehog X)

As if some of the problems enumerated above weren't bad enough, we must now add to the mix the nature of bureaucracy. The case in point here is the plight of "Hedgehog X" (who may wind up being abducted and going into the Witness Protection Program). We will call this hedgehog "Hedgehog X" because at the time of this writing this is still an active case and we would not want the hedgehog to come to harm at the hands of bureaucratic jack-booted thugs if they were to get wind of this. Hedgehog X was purchased from a hedgehog breeder with money obtained from a classroom enrichment grant written up by a teacher. However, after keeping the hedgehog as a classroom pet for a semester or two, the teacher moved on, but the hedgehog stayed. After all, having been purchased with school grant money, the hedgehog was the "property" of the school district. Hedgehog X, the government hedgehog, was "assigned" to another teacher.

Upon assuming her hedgehog management duties, the new teacher noticed several things about the hedgehog that were disturbing. In addition to inadequate space to live and what she thought was a poor diet, the hedgehog seemed ill and lethargic. Although the hedgehog was "school property," the grant did not provide for maintenance, and so there were no funds for veterinary care. The teacher was told to raise the veterinary money on her own, perhaps do a fund raiser with the students. Y'know, sort of like having a bake sale to buy adequate armored vests for our troops in Iraq. I don't know what this school district does when they need to call a plumber or have the furnace repaired. Bureaucracies, gotta love 'em, large and small.

To add insult to injury, when the teacher asked to take Hedgehog X into her own care (where she would pay the veterinary care bills) she was told that the hedgehog was school property and that the administration could not turn the hedgehog over to her. She was told that if the hedgehog became ill, they'd just have to let the hedgehog "go." Asked what the administration meant by the word "go" the teacher was informed that the hedgehog could not "go" with the teacher but could "go" on and die from lack of medical attention.

The above story is a factual, ongoing case. I am not making this up. The fact remains that often school administration just may be a teacher's worst enemy in bringing innovative learning to the classroom. My advice to the teacher was to stage an "escape" and have the hedgehog disappear into the underground hedgehog fugitive railroad. I suggested she consult with some people in Pennsylvania as to how this may be effectively done.

What is a mother to do?

In light of all the apparent difficulties in introducing a hedgehog into the classroom setting and ruling out the possibility of not doing it at all, in the words of my favorite law professor, Irv Silberberg, "What is a mother to do?" My suggestions follow what successful teachers I have known embrace in introducing these ancient and fascinating creatures to their students, thus enriching their lives and their knowledge of the world. It takes a little work, so it's not for everyone. One does NOT just chuck the hedgehog in an aquarium in the corner and hope someone feeds her.

Responsible teachers that I have known bring the "class" hedgehog to school only occasionally (perhaps once a week) and never leaves the hedgehog in the classroom overnight. The hedgehog is cared for by the teacher at home and is not farmed out to various students for care. An exception may be placing the hedgehog in the care of a student if that student is well educated in hedgehog care and mature enough to do the job. In the latter case, the hedgehog in the care of a responsible student should be transported to and from the school in a parent's vehicle and never on a school bus (lack of control of other students and the environment).

Utmost care must be taken when allowing the hedgehog-student interactions, being particularly cautious that a student is not bitten. Students should never be allowed to hold the hedgehog and must be closely supervised when making direct contact for the reasons enumerated above.

Contingency plans should be contrived in the event of a power outage or other possible emergency that may place the hedgehog in peril. A suitable environment should be permanently in place for the hedgehog's visits to the classroom. Finally, close coordination must be made with school administration to insure that valid educational experiences and the welfare of both students and hedgehogs will not be compromised.

Young people assimilate and fix their moral values that they will carry with them for the rest of their lives by about age ten. Teaching kindness, compassion, and responsibility toward the other citizens of this Earth begins at an early age. Hedgehogs can assist in this teaching and may, as well, create fond memories in the lives of students.

Z. G. Standing Bear is a semi-retired self-labeled geezer who has served almost a third of a century as an Army officer, a couple of decades as a university professor and, having been a government employee since age five (he counts public school), is now ready to "settle down." He has been a hedgehog rescuer and educator for the past ten years.

Have a story or image you would like to share?

IHA members are encouraged to contribute stories, articles, questions and images for future editions of the IHA News.

To contribute, please contact Susan at twinksusan@hotmail.com or Julie at kalandra@gmail.com.

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