

Doorstep Wildlife

Even if you live in a busy town or city, wildlife will be all around you as it manages to survive pretty much everywhere; you just have to look to find it! If you search hard enough, you will probably find signs of urban creatures in your street, on your school playing field, through your window, at the park or in any busy, built-up space. Let's take a closer look at just some of the animals and birds that manage to survive in our towns and cities...

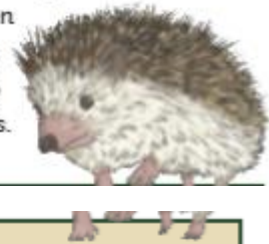
Foxes

It is estimated that there are around 33,000 foxes (mammals with reddish orange fur and bushy tails) living in and around urban areas in the UK. They are the most common wild **carnivore** found in our towns and cities and have adapted brilliantly to life in busy surroundings. They eat a wide and varied diet, which includes food stolen from dustbins, bird tables and compost heaps, as well as wild mammals, birds, earthworms, beetles and fruit. Foxes are mostly **nocturnal** animals but they are often seen in urban areas during the day. Unfortunately, many foxes are sadly killed on the roads each year in the UK.



Hedgehogs

Hedgehogs can be found in almost all urban areas of the UK, except some areas of Scotland. The spiky mammals live in nests under hedges, where lots of insects and other **invertebrates** can be found. Unlike foxes and pigeons, hedgehogs are well-liked in the UK and are often called the 'gardener's friend' as they love eating creatures such as caterpillars, slugs and snails, which can often be very damaging to garden plants. Hedgehogs have sharp quills on their back. When they feel threatened, they contract two large muscles in their back. This causes these quills to straighten out. At the same time, the hedgehog also curls up into a ball, tucking its face and legs into its belly. This protects it from potential danger. Sadly, it is estimated that just one million hedgehogs are left in the UK, which is a 97% decrease since the 1950s.



Did You Know...?

Thinking it is good for them, people often leave bread and milk out in their gardens for urban hedgehogs to snack on but actually you should never feed hedgehogs milk as it can cause them to become terribly ill. Instead, try and provide them with plain, fresh water in a shallow bowl along with tinned dog or cat food.

Pigeons

Pigeons are one of the most common birds within the UK. Their cooing calls are a very familiar sound within most cities and town centres. They survive by eating dropped food and litter, as well as insects, seeds and food from bird feeders in urban gardens. Pigeons are often considered to be **vermin**, with many people believing that they carry disease, damage property and pollute urban areas with their droppings. Some city councils have even tried to reduce the number of pigeons by destroying nesting sites, removing pigeon eggs from nests and introducing more regular litter collections.



Glossary

carnivore	An animal that eats other creatures.
invertebrate	An animal without a backbone.
nocturnal	A creature that is active at night (and may sleep during daylight hours).
vermin	An animal that causes harm or damage or is difficult to control.

How Can We Help Urban Wildlife to Survive?

Over the last few decades, the number of many urban animals has dropped, which is due mainly to the reduced numbers of gardens, parks and open green spaces. It is now much more dangerous for urban animals to find food and move from place to place than it was fifty years ago... but you can help them!

If you have any outdoor space or a garden, you could try to help urban animals by:

- making and hanging a simple bird feeder;
- making holes in fences;
- planting flowers and plants.



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