

# Doorstep Wildlife

Even if you live in a busy town or city, wildlife will be all around you, 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

There are around 33,000 foxes living in urban areas in the UK. They are mammals, about the size of a small dog, with red fur and bushy tails. They are the most common wild **carnivore** found in our towns and cities mainly because they eat almost anything, including:

- food from dustbins, bird tables and compost heaps;
- wild mammals;
- birds;
- earthworms;
- beetles;
- fruit.

Foxes are mostly **nocturnal** animals but they are often seen in urban areas during the day. Sadly, many foxes are killed each year on busy roads.



## 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. The hedgehog is often called the 'gardener's friend' as it loves eating small creatures, such as caterpillars, slugs and snails, which can often damage 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, the number of hedgehogs has gone down a lot in the last 60 years. It is thought that there are just one million hedgehogs left in the UK.



### Did You Know...?

You should never feed hedgehogs milk as it can cause them to become very sick. Instead, try and give them fresh water in a shallow bowl along with tinned dog or cat food.

### Pigeons

Pigeons are stout-bodied birds of the Columbidae family and are likely to be one of the most common birds within the UK. They have a cooing call, which is a very familiar sound within most busy cities and town centres. They often eat food from pavements and litter bins, as well as eating insects, seeds and food from bird feeders in urban gardens. Pigeons are often called vermin because many people believe that:

- they spread illness;
- they damage houses and buildings;
- their droppings (poo) are not nice to look at.



Some cities have even tried to lower the number of pigeons by destroying nesting sites, removing pigeon eggs from nests and emptying litter bins more often.

### 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).
urban	A word to describe something that manages to survive in a busy place like a city or town.
vermin	An animal that causes harm or damage or is difficult to control.

### How Can We Help Urban Wildlife to Survive?

Over the last 30 years, the number of some urban animals has fallen because:

- there are fewer gardens, parks and fields where they can live and find food;
- patches of grass and gardens are now not connected so they find it difficult and dangerous to move around.

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.