

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 and all around our town and city centres. However, many challenges face birds and animals that live in these places – can you think what they might be? Let's take a closer look at just some of the species that manage to successfully inhabit urban environments...

Pigeons

Pigeons are one of the most common birds within the UK. Their cooing calls are a very familiar sound within most busy built-up areas, where they have adapted to life by scavenging food in city and town centres as well as eating 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 cities have even tried to reduce their pigeon population by reducing nesting sites, removing pigeon eggs from nests and introducing more efficient litter collections to limit their food supplies.



Foxes

They are the most common wild carnivore (an animal that eats other creatures) found in our towns and cities and they have adapted brilliantly to life in busy surroundings. They thrive because of their wide and varied diet: eating scavenged food from dustbins, bird tables and compost heaps whilst also regularly consuming wild mammals, birds, earthworms, beetles and fruit. Foxes are mostly nocturnal animals, which means that they are usually only active at night, but actually they are often seen in urban areas during the day. Unfortunately, many foxes are sadly killed on the busy roads of the UK each year.



Hedgehogs

Hedgehogs can be found in almost all urban areas of the UK, except some areas of Scotland. They prefer moist habitats in farmlands, gardens or even parks. The spiky mammals live in nests under hedges, where ground-dwelling insects and other invertebrates (animals with no backbone) are in large quantity. In contrast to the urban fox and pigeon, the hedgehog has a more-respected reputation with it being considered the 'gardener's friend', as it loves eating so many 'pests'. Some of their favourite foods are small 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. Despite having their own in-built defence mechanisms, hedgehogs are in serious decline. It is estimated that just one million hedgehogs are left in the UK, which shows a 97% decrease since the 1950s when there was a population of 30 million.



Trying to be helpful, people often leave bread and milk out in their gardens and outdoor spaces for urban hedgehogs to snack on, but actually you should never feed hedgehogs milk as it can cause them terrible stomach problems. Instead, try and provide them with plain, fresh water in a shallow bowl along with tinned dog or cat food.

How Can We Help Urban Wildlife to Survive?

Over the last few decades, many urban animal species have declined, which is due mainly to the reduced numbers of gardens, parks and open green spaces. The loss of connected wild and grassy areas makes it more hazardous for urban animals to find food and move from place to place... but you can help them!

If you live in a built-up neighbourhood, try to turn any outdoor space or garden that you have into a wildlife-friendly area. You can do this by making and hanging a simple bird feeder, making holes in fences to help hedgehogs and other small mammals travel between spaces or planting flowers to encourage insect life.