

Name: _____

Who's Hiding Under Those Spines?

by Guy Belleranti

What small mammal has prickly spine-like hairs on its back, sides and top of head and can roll in into a protective ball? If you said hedgehog, you're right.

A hedgehog is born with pink skin and with its eyes closed. The newborn does have some softer spines, but they're hidden beneath the skin. Shortly after birth stiffer spines start to appear. By the time the animal is an adult it will have 5,000 to 7,000 of these special one-inch long hairs.



When frightened, the animal curls into a ball sheltering its soft legs, belly and face. The tighter it curls the spinier it becomes. Special muscles help the hedgehog roll up.

Hedgehogs are nocturnal, meaning they come out at night. Their eyesight is poor, but they have good hearing and a great sense of smell to locate food.

So what kind of food do hedgehogs eat? Insects, worms, snails, eggs, berries, seeds and small animals like mice, frogs and snakes. In fact, hedgehogs even have some immunity to snake venom and other toxins.

There are approximately 15 different species of hedgehogs. They live in habitats ranging from forests to desert. Hedgehogs are native to Europe, Asia and Africa. They have also been introduced into New Zealand. There are no hedgehogs native to North or South America.



Some people see a hedgehog and think it is a baby porcupine. However, while both are mammals, they are not related. Porcupines have quills that are barbed so they stick into an attacker. Hedgehog spines, meanwhile, are not barbed, though they do provide protection from predators. In addition, porcupines are rodents and are much larger animals. Hedgehogs aren't rodents, but are instead believed to be distant relatives of shrews, moles and tenrecs.

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1. Which is larger a hedgehog or a porcupine? _____
2. Is a hedgehog more closely related to a porcupine or a mole? _____
3. The article states that, "hedgehogs have some immunity to snake venom and other toxins." What does this mean?
 - a. Snake venom is especially poisonous to hedgehogs.
 - b. Snake venom never harms hedgehogs.
 - c. Snake venom does not always harm hedgehogs.
 - d. Hedgehogs kill snakes for their venom.
4. According to the article, which fact about hedgehogs is not true.
 - a. Hedgehogs use their sense of smell to find food.
 - b. Hedgehogs have excellent eyesight.
 - c. Hedgehogs have a good sense of hearing.
 - d. Some hedgehogs can live in the desert.
5. What does a hedgehog do when it is frightened?

6. How are a porcupine's quills different from a hedgehog's spines?

7. How are the spines of a newborn hedgehog different from the spines of an adult hedgehog?

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Vocabulary Activity

The scrambled words below are vocabulary words from the article. Unscramble each word and write it on the line. Please be sure each word is spelled correctly.



1. _____

s e t g h e y i

hint: ability to see clearly

2. _____

l a m m a

hint: warm-blooded vertebrate with hair or fur

3. _____

y l b e l

hint: stomach area

4. _____

n v e m o

hint: poison from an animal

5. _____

w e r s h

hint: tiny mammal that looks like a mouse

6. _____

a c e l o t

hint: find

7. _____

t e r a x p o m i a l y

hint: about; estimated number

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Writing Activity

The article, "Who's Hiding Under Those Spines?" tells us all about hedgehogs.

Hedgehogs are also popular pets. Would you want a pet hedgehog? Write a paragraph to explain why you would or would not want a pet hedgehog.

[illegible]

ANSWER KEY

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1. Which is larger a hedgehog or a porcupine? **porcupine**
2. Is a hedgehog more closely related to a porcupine or a mole? **mole**
3. The article states that, "hedgehogs have some immunity to snake venom and other toxins." What does this mean?
 - a. Snake venom is especially poisonous to hedgehogs.
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4. According to the article, which fact about hedgehogs is not true.
 - a. Hedgehogs use their sense of smell to find food.
 - b. **Hedgehogs have excellent eyesight.**
 - c. Hedgehogs have a good sense of hearing.
 - d. Some hedgehogs can live in the desert.
5. What does a hedgehog do when it is frightened?
It curls up into a ball, sheltering its soft legs, belly, and face.
6. How are a porcupine's quills different from a hedgehog's spines?
Porcupines have quills which are barbed so they stick to an attacker. Hedgehogs have spines which are not barbed.
7. How are the spines of a newborn hedgehog different from the spines of an adult hedgehog?
A newborn hedgehog has soft spines beneath the skin. An adult has stiffer spines that cover its body.

ANSWER KEY

Who's Hiding Under Those Spines?

Vocabulary Activity

The scrambled words below are vocabulary words from the article. Unscramble each word and write it on the line. Please be sure each word is spelled correctly.



1. eyesight s e t g h e y i
hint: ability to see clearly

2. mammal l a m m a
hint: warm-blooded vertebrate with hair or fur

3. belly y l b e l
hint: stomach area

4. venom n v e m o
hint: poison from an animal

5. shrew w e r s h
hint: tiny mammal that looks like a mouse

6. locate a c e l o t
hint: find

7. approximately t e r a x p o p m i a l y
hint: about; estimated number