

P.H.

Curling up into a ball of prickles (top left) protects the hedgehog from most would-be predators. Each spine has alternating bands of brown and white, usually 3 of each (left). This mottled colouring acts as a camouflage for the hedgehog while asleep during the day.

Although you may see hedgehog casualties on the road, it is only a tiny proportion of the total number of hedgehogs that are killed by traffic here in New Zealand. Of 214 hedgehogs tagged by R. E. Brockie in suburban Lower Hutt between 1970 and 1972, only 4% were actually run over during that period. Out in the country the proportion would be even smaller.

well, and today you will find them just about everywhere where the conditions suit them.

Apparently they do not like it to be too wet, nor too cold, for their distribution as recorded by R. E. Brockie in 1975 showed them to be absent from areas where the rainfall was above 250cm a year, or where there were more than 250 frosts in a year.

In the European winter the hedgehog hibernates. He rolls himself into a ball in a pile of dead leaves and goes into a deep sleep until the weather is warmer again.

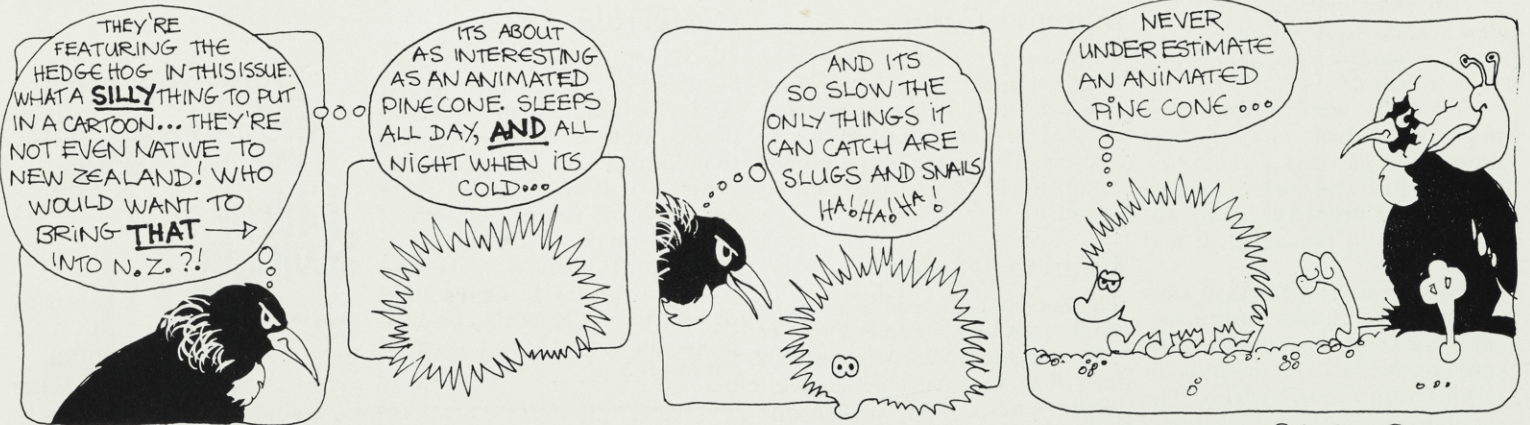
The reason for this seems to be not so much because he can't stand the cold, but because there is no food around for him at that time of year. Pet hedgehogs that are fed regularly at the back door, may not hibernate to the same extent as their less fortunate brethren out in the woods.

In the winterless north of New Zealand the hedgehog has adapted to the fact that there is a plentiful supply of food all the year round, and may not hibernate at all. Elsewhere, he will spend the colder parts of the year in a

winter nest, where the brown and white bands of colour on each spine will make him very difficult to spot among the dead grass and leaves.

You will not often see hedgehogs, even in the summer, for they prefer to sleep during the day. In England we used to put a saucer of milk out in the evening for the ones that lived in our garden. We were able to get to know them quite well, for hedgehogs are very fond of milk.

Piers Hayman



BY SUE BELL

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