

Mark Whitley's country diary



CELEBRATING TEN YEARS OF HAPPY HENS

A charity set up to educate the public about laying-hen welfare celebrates its tenth anniversary this month.

The British Hen Welfare Trust, best known for its re-homing initiative, has found pet homes for over 450,000 commercial laying hens destined for slaughter since it was established in 2005.

"I am thrilled to be celebrating our tenth anniversary," says Jane Howorth, the trust's founder, "and more importantly to have found homes for so many hens and introduced people to the joys of keeping our lovely ex-bat hens."

The charity puts its success down to its pragmatic approach to the egg industry, as Jane explains:

"Of course we could not have reached this point without the trust of the farmers who let us take their birds. I am particularly proud of our relationship with the egg industry. It has taken time to build trust, but I believe farmers now understand that we, too, want to see a strong and successful UK egg industry that values high welfare."

As well as finding homes for hens, the charity educates the public on how they

can make a difference to hen welfare through their shopping basket, and encourages people to check their food labels. The charity has a simple concept in trying to increase awareness of hen welfare and, through its adoption scheme, has been able to illustrate that once consumers directly connect food and welfare through the hens, this heavily influences their shopping habits.



British Hen Welfare Trust founder Jane Howorth, and Liberty the Hen. The charity celebrates its tenth birthday this month.



Increased consumer awareness has led to big names switching to free-range eggs, such as Marks & Spencer which led the way in 2002, and Hellmann's which started using free-range eggs in its mayonnaise from 2011. Policy changes such as these have improved the quality of life for tens of thousands of hens and continue to do so — consumer clout at its most powerful, according to the charity.

"I have long believed in the power of the consumer," Jane confirms, "and while consumers will often choose to buy free-range eggs to use in cooking, they are unaware of how many eggs are used in processed food products."

"It is gratifying to see how gradual policy switch among major retailers and food manufacturers is resulting in the increased use of free-range eggs."

"Even through recession, free-range egg sales have largely held their own."

More information at www.bhwt.org.uk

HELP FOR HEDGEHOGS

Hedgehog numbers are in decline in the UK at a rate that is comparable to the

loss of the world's tigers. So what can be done to help? The British Hedgehog Preservation Society is doing its bit by organising Hedgehog Awareness Week (3rd-9th May) to highlight the plight of the nation's only spiny mammal.



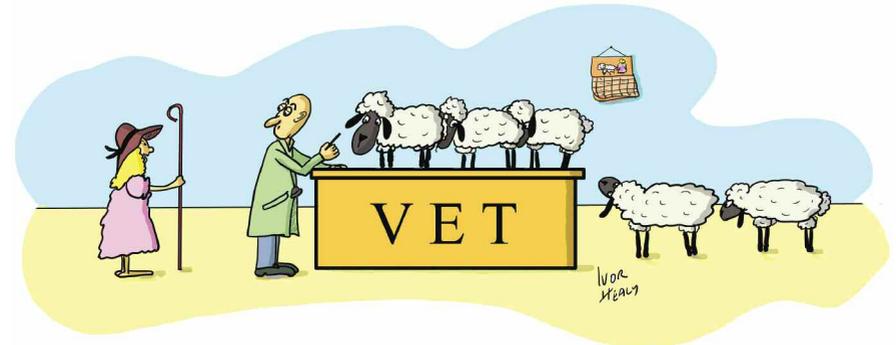
Society chief executive Fay Vass says a big problem for hedgehogs is loss and fragmentation of habitat, so much can be done in our own back gardens to help.

"Ensuring easy access is first on the list: simply make a five-inch-square gap in boundary fences or walls," Fay explains. "Also it is important to check areas carefully before mowing; check bonfire piles before lighting by moving material to a new site before setting fire to it; and offer a meaty petfood, dried mealworms or chopped unsalted peanuts for hedgehogs to eat, with fresh water to drink."

You can find out more on the society's website www.britishhedgehogs.org.uk

NATURE INSPIRES TOP JEWELLERS

Ten of the country's best contemporary jewellers have been inspired by their experiences of park life — trees, wildlife and flowers — to create jewellery collections



"I'm sick of losing them — microchip the lot!"



for A Walk in the Park, at the Craft Centre & Design Gallery Leeds until 27th June.

The jewellers include Anna De Ville, whose inspiration comes from the natural world. Since she started showing her work at the British Bird Watching Fair each summer at Rutland Water RSPB reserve, Anna has become obsessed with trying to create the character of the native birds and animals, as she explains:

"Sometimes my pieces are humorous, sometimes more stylised. Hares and foxes (*top left*) sit alongside cheeky starlings and bemused-looking owls. These handmade pieces are a joy to work on."



Kate Rhodes' jewellery (*left*) explores birds, branches and leaves combined with 1950s textiles and sculpture for inspiration, as well as the interplay of the colours and textures of the metals.

www.craftcentreleeds.co.uk

PAUSE FOR THOUGHT

"The sun was warm but the wind was chill. You know how it is with an April day."

Robert Frost