

Northiam Parish Biodiversity Action Plan. Action for the Hedgehog DRAFT 14 November 2022

Introduction

The hedgehog is a declining species of mammal. By 2022 they had suffered a 30 - 75% reduction in numbers, with the greatest impact in eastern England. The species is:

- Listed as “Vulnerable” in the Red List for Britain’s mammals.
- A “Species of principle importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England”, under section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. Under this legislation a Parish Council must, in exercising its functions, have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity.

Presence in Northiam Parish

Hedgehogs in Northiam appear to be found across the Parish, but in low numbers. This situation is typical of Rother District.

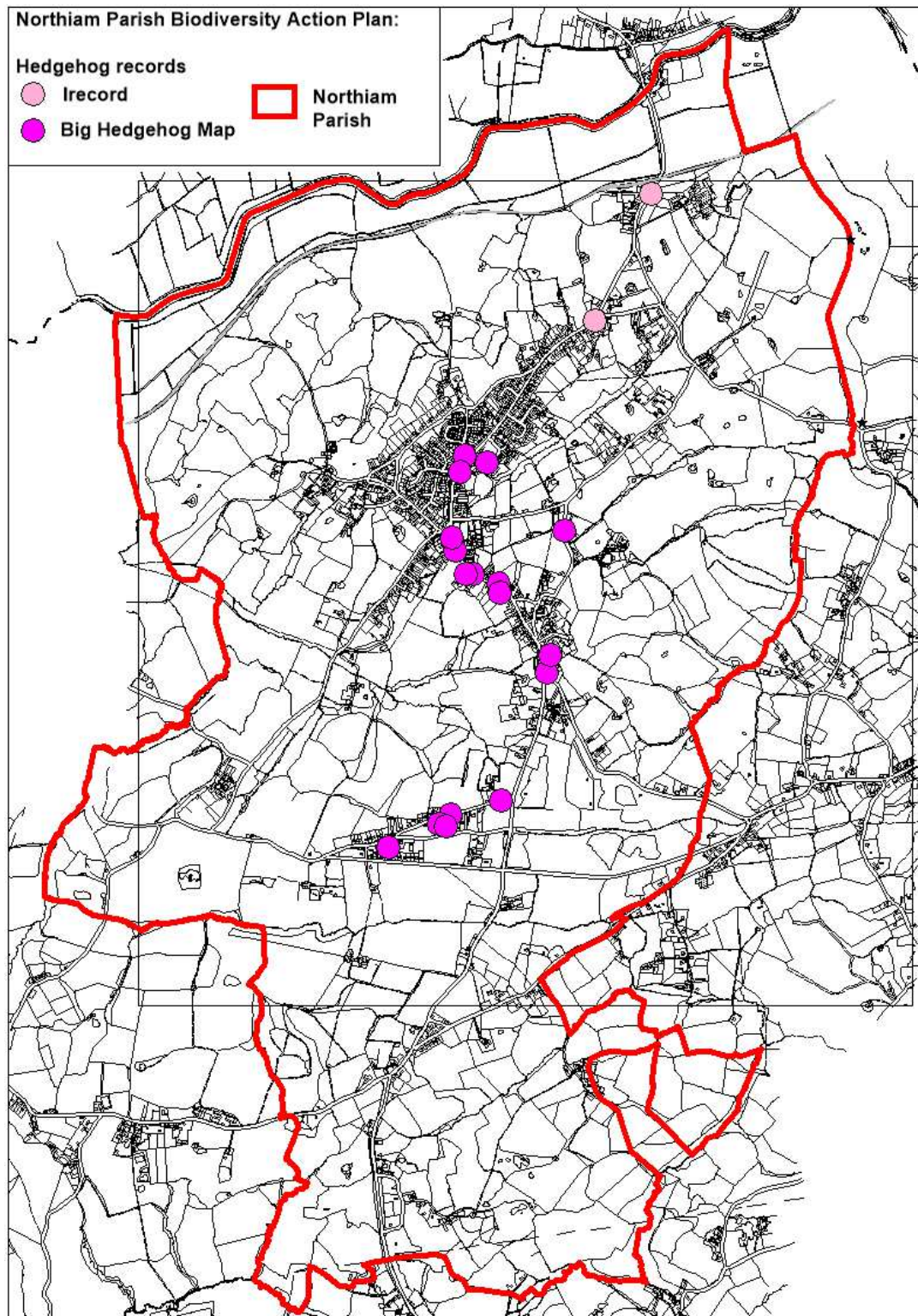
Prior to 2018 there were very few hedgehog records from Northiam on the Big Hedgehog Map, a national scheme to record sightings, started in 2011, or on another scheme Irecord. A Facebook project to encourage people to record sightings in Northiam commenced in 2020 and has pushed the numbers of records on the Big Hedgehog Map up from less than 5 to 21. These results demonstrate their range across the village (see Figure 1).

Hedgehogs are most likely to be seen at night, crossing roads or feeding in gardens, or as roadkill. They are still under-recorded in the countryside. There are clusters of records on Main Street between the Spar and Wills, and at Mill Corner. Because hedgehogs can travel a long way at night (up to one mile) these records may result from relatively few animals. At present there is no information on changes in abundance.



A Northiam hedgehog. Photo by Valerie Knell in 2022

Figure 1. Records of hedgehogs in Northiam since 2011.



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Why are hedgehogs uncommon in the Parish?

The abundance of predators such as fox and badger in Northiam is sometimes suggested as a reason for the scarcity of hedgehogs. Badgers share a similar diet (large invertebrates) and are therefore also competitors, capable of eating five times as much food. Despite this the

three species shared the countryside for thousands of years, so the relationship is more complicated than might at first appear to be the case.

A recent report (The state of Britain's hedgehogs, 2022) stated that whilst numbers of hedgehog continue to decline in the countryside their numbers are stable in built-up areas where they benefit from gardens. Access to gardens is therefore important. In rural areas hedgehogs may be suffering from lack of suitable habitat and habitat fragmentation. They are more likely to be found in villages than open farmland that lacks hedgerows or field margins (that provide cover from predators).

What can we do to encourage the species in Northiam Parish

Knowledge and understanding:

1. Continue encouraging the submission of records to the Big Hedgehog Map to better understand their distribution and trends in sightings. This will be done through the Facebook group Northiam, naturally! and the Parish Magazine.
2. Consider photo-trapping hedgehogs at locations such as Great Dixter or St Francis Fields to try to prove presence away from residential areas.

Village habitat management:

3. Encourage the planting of hedgerows in the countryside. On Parish Council land this has happened in the Northiam Conservation Society Orchard, but potential remains for more hedgerow planting at St Francis Fields.
4. Consider the creation of strips of wild-flower grassland around the margins of large open areas, such as the amenity grassland at Goddens Gill.

Garden management

5. Encourage the use of gardens by creating Hedgehog Highways. An initiative to link gardens, where hedgerow boundaries do not exist, by providing holes in gravel boards at the base of fences 13 cm x 13 cm.
6. Encourage new developments to have hedgehog holes in garden fences so animals can move between gardens. Areas of rough vegetation could be provided beyond new developments for biodiversity gain.
7. Encourage creation of hedgehog friendly features in gardens such as log-piles, leaf-piles or an open compost heap as shelters for hedgehogs, a rough corner or a wildflower meadow to provide insects as hedgehog food.
8. Make sure that garden ponds have a gently sloping escape route to avoid drowning hedgehogs.

Promotion

9. Encourage individuals to become Hedgehog Champions and promote their conservation in the village.