



The Caddington Hedgehog Sanctuary

A labor of love makes for a heartfelt retirement.

by Susie Kearley

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Angela Smith

The verdant gardens behind the tidy, brick home in Caddington, England, hold a secret; dozens of tiny, lovely secrets in fact. Caddington Hedgehog Sanctuary is home to sick and injured hedgehogs and offers an unusual space for them to recover. It's run by Angela Smith, who gave up conventional work to follow her passion, caring for hedgehogs in need. She calls the sanctuary her "mid life crisis," saying she'd been working in the banking industry, then childcare, before deciding to rescue these tiny creatures in need.

Angela's journey began 20 years ago when she started reading books on how to help sick hedgehogs. In 2003, after many hours of study, she opened a hospital for injured hedgehogs at her home in Bedfordshire and then gave up her job so she could commit to the work full time.

In the beginning, opening a hedgehog hospital was a huge challenge. Angela took in sick and injured hedgehogs and restored them to health, working closely with the local vet.

"The vet showed me how to administer treatments, and over many years, I learnt how to do basic veterinary care at home, providing antibiotics, lungworm medicine, and other routine treatments," Angela explains. "The vet treats me like a farm client, providing sufficient medicine to treat all my hedgehogs."

She's used pioneering procedures and new techniques when faced with hedgehogs who need her to go the extra mile.

"The vet has tried experimental approaches, with good results. As we work together and face new challenges, he learns new things and so do I!" Angela says.

Life in the Hedgehog Garden

Angela and her husband moved to Lincolnshire in 2009, where she continues to take in hundreds of needy hedgehogs. There are three hedgehog sheds in the back garden, with space for 120 patients. The sheds are all occupied by sick and injured hedgehogs on various medications. Her remarkably understanding husband takes holidays on his own so she can stay at home, looking after the hogs.

Angela needs about £1,000 each year to pay for vets bills, operating costs, and hospital equipment. She gives talks to community groups to raise money, along with serving cream teas, holding plant sales, selling cards, and creating hand-crafted wooden goods to sell.

Her permanent residents live in her hedgehog garden, which is now secured like Fort Knox after a crisis a few years ago when a badger stormed the hedgehog garden, breaking down the fences

and taking the elderly or disabled hedgehogs who were living there because they could not survive in the wild.

Angela was devastated when she woke in the morning to find her beloved hedgehog garden in ruins. She didn't realize it wasn't badger-proof and set about correcting the situation quickly, erecting a much stronger fence to keep predators out.

Today, she has three permanent residents, one with a trimmer injury, which means she cannot curl up; one who's missing a leg; and one who hasn't mentally developed properly. Previous residents included one with malformed hands who had trouble foraging and one who never grew up and needed intensive feeding every six weeks.

"He was so small!" she says. Hedgehogs are nocturnal, so they're not around in the daytime, but she's had blind hedgehogs before, who come out exploring at all hours.



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A Natural Way to Heal

Angela is a keen gardener and has created colorful, themed areas and plenty of natural places for recovered hedgehogs to forage and explore. She always releases the hedgehogs into the wild once they're fully recovered, except when they have ongoing needs or disabilities that mean they can't survive on their own. A local nature reserve is a perfect release site — there's plenty of food and lots of places to hide, with few predators.

Running the hedgehog hospital and sanctuary is the fulfilment of Angela's dream. It gives her an immense sense of purpose and well-being, but it can also be very demanding.

"Sleep is a luxury!" she says. "Sometimes I have hedgehogs who need feeding every hour."

This can make it difficult to go out or take holidays. She has, however, managed to streamline her processes and treatments, so she works very efficiently and can tend to all her patients' needs easily, even during busy periods.

Since opening the hospital and sanctuary, Angela has treated more than 3,500 hedgehogs, and she releases about 60% back into the wild. She's had about 22 who have permanently retired to her hedgehog garden over the years, and at the time of this writing, she has 100 hedgehogs in hospital. There are always some who are so badly injured that she cannot save them, but she does her very best.



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Healing the Hurting

Last winter, the U.K. had unusually wet weather and severe floods that affected the hedgehog population in Lincolnshire. Most of November's new arrivals had ringworm infections, caused by the damp weather.

"I've never had so many with ringworm!" Angela said at the time.

Lungworm is the most common problem affecting her hedgehogs the rest of the year. The parasite enters their lungs, causing inflammation and making it difficult for them to breathe. She gives them antibiotics, a lungworm drug, a decongestant, and sometimes a steroid if she thinks they will benefit from it.

"In the autumn, a lot of orphans come in," she explains. "The mothers go into hibernation, but youngsters who've been born late in the season are too small to hibernate — they need to gain weight or they'll die from the cold. So the young hedgehogs come in with all sorts of problems, including lungworm, fly strike and ringworm. I take them in, warm them up, feed them, and give them any medical treatments they need. With any luck, they'll hibernate while they're staying with me and I can release them when they wake up in the spring."

Angela gets great pleasure from seeing the little hedgehogs get well and releasing them in good health. She shares her passion with people from the surrounding community, and they support her in return so she can continue doing what is important to her.

When we retire, it can feel like the end of an era. On the other hand, it can be the start of a new adventure. Retirement offers the opportunity to enjoy life, doing things you didn't have time for before — catching up with friends, traveling, reading, or pursuing new hobbies and interests. We should all strive to do things that fill our hearts with joy; it's the fastest way to fall in love with our new lives! ♦

Learn more:

Enjoy more stories about the hedgehog sanctuary and Angela's caring heart at www.caddingtonhedgehogs.blogspot.com.