

Blonde Hedgehogs

One of the most famous residents on Alderney is the extremely rare Blonde Hedgehog (Leucistic), also known as "Alderney Spike Girls". These Blondie's are very rare in Britain with only three examples found in thirty years of research, however, on the island of Alderney about twenty five percent of the hedgehog population is blonde.

Blonde hedgehogs became extinct on the island in the early nineteenth century, but today there are said to be over 1,000 pairs inhabiting the island.

The origin of the blonde hedgehogs remain a mystery although some claim the first species arrived on the island in the 1960's, in a Harrods shopping bag. Five hedgehogs (including blondes) are believed to have been bought from Harrods in London, and accidentally released on the island.

Blonde hedgehogs are genetic variants. Their whiteness is caused by a recessive gene found in the common brown hedgehog; they are not albinos as often thought. These hedgehogs are just born blonde. Blonde hedgehogs have button-black eyes and attractive creamy-coloured spines, pink feet and noses, while albinos have pink eyes and pure-white spines.

It is thought that one of the animals introduced to the island was a carrier of this rare gene and it has spread throughout the hedgehog population. Normal-colour hedgehogs produce blondes only if both parents carry the blonde gene. As inbreeding occurred within the captive population, the rare gene was passed on.

"The two types interbreed but have differing characteristics. The brown ones tend to be more tenacious and aggressive, while blondes are more placid and amenable to handling." said Alderney Resident and Hedgehog carer Barbara Head.

The other interesting point about the blonde hedgehogs is that they don't carry fleas, and with no predators Alderney's hedgehogs are now in abundance and are thought to be the only breeding population of its type in the world. Among Alderney's other unusual residents are black rabbits.

