



## HEDGEHOG

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**HEDGEHOG** (*kār-pošt*, *juja-tiġi*, *čula*; [Figure 1](#), [Figure 2](#)), member of the Erinaceinae sub-family of the Erinaceidae family of insectivores; animals the size of a small rabbit, the hairs of the upper body of which are modified and clumped to form stiff, sharp spines. A sheet of muscle beneath the skin of the back keeps these spines erect and also allows the animal to roll into a defensive ball, thus protecting its head, limbs, tail, and belly from attack.

The following four species of hedgehog can be found in Persia; at least two of them can also be found in Afghanistan, while three of them can be found in an area extending into the Central Asian republics to the north, as indicated below (nomenclature follows Hutterer, 1992, after Corbet, 1988, and Frost et al., 1991):

*Erinaceus concolor* (Martin, 1838). In addition to Persia, this species is found in eastern Europe, southern Russia, and western Siberia as far as the River Ob, Asia Minor as far as Israel, and the Greek and Adriatic Islands. (It had previously been included among the *E. europæus*, or “European hedgehog” species.)

*Hemiechinus (Paraechinus) aethiopicus* (Ehrinberg, 1832), or “Ethiopian hedgehog.” It is found in southeastern Iran as well as the Sahara from Mauritania to Egypt and Awash, Ethiopia, and the deserts of Arabia; there are also insular populations on Djerba (Tunisia), Bahrain, and Tanb (Persian Gulf). The species and subspecies arrangement of the Ethiopian hedgehog remains unclear.



*Hemiechinus (Hemiechinus) auritus* (Gmelin, 1770), or “Long-eared hedgehog.” It is found in the Steppe zone from eastern Ukraine to Mongolia in the north, and from Libya to western Pakistan in the south. *Hemiechinus megalotis*, formerly regarded as a distinct species, integrates with *H. auritus* in Afghanistan (see Niethammer, 1973).

*Hemiechinus (Paraechinus) hypomelas* (Brandt, 1836), and known as “Brandt’s hedgehog.” It is found in arid steppe and desert zones, from Iran and Turkmenistan eastwards almost as far as Tashkent (Uzbekistan), and southwards to the Indus River and northern Pakistan; there are also isolated populations in Oman, near Aden, and on the islands of Tanb and Kārg in the Persian Gulf. This species includes *H. blanfordi* as a distinct subspecies (see Corbet, 1988, p.155).

Biogeographically, *E. concolor*, a temperate Eurasian species, is the hedgehog of the well-watered forest, shrub-land, and agricultural areas of northwestern and northern Iran through to the Alborz region. *H. hypomelas*, a species belonging to the eastern Iranian Plateau, is widespread throughout the country south of the area occupied by *E. concolor*. *H. auritus*, a Western Palearctic steppe species, occurs around the peripheries of the Central Plateau, including Kūzestān and Sistān, while *H. aethiopicus*, a North African/Arabian desert species, has a scattered distribution in Baluchistan and the islands of the Persian Gulf.

The various species of hedgehogs are found in deciduous woodlands, cultivated fields, and desert regions. They are primarily nocturnal. Hedgehogs are omnivorous, but they prefer animal food; they consume a wide variety of insects and other arthropods, as well as birds eggs, small mammals, lizards, and snakes (they are said to be resistant to snake venom). Hibernation in dens in the ground or rock crevices is a characteristic of the species of the genus *Erinaceus*, and at least some of the desert species (*Hemiechinus*) aestivate (lie dormant during hot, dry periods) in well-constructed burrows. Most species of hedgehog seem to be solitary, apart from during the breeding season. Up to seven are born at a time in nests of grass or other soft vegetation after a gestation period of about a month. They are born with eyes closed, and their spines do not harden until about three weeks have passed. Populations of hedgehogs appear to be quite dense in some areas, particularly agricultural regions. They have adjusted well to living in the vicinity of human activity. Roads appear to be a major hazard, and road-kill carcasses can be numerous in areas where there is a large population of hedgehogs. They may be of minor



economic importance in agricultural areas, where they prey on insects, such as locusts. They also serve as food for larger predators, such as owls, foxes, wolves, wild cats, leopards, bears and, probably, hyenas, which can overcome their sole means of defense.

In general, few detailed studies of the natural history of the hedgehogs of Persia and Afghanistan have ever been carried out, and apparently none at all has been undertaken in those countries themselves.

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