

Felix's hedgehog legacy

When one boy's life was cut tragically short, his family created an animal conservation project in memory of his passion for wildlife



Photography: Richard Cannon

HEDGEHOG HEAVEN Jane Byam Shaw surveys the garden they have cultivated

As a small boy Felix Byam Shaw was passionate about animals, and he particularly longed to see a hedgehog in his garden. For years, there were none, but when, at the age of 11, he stumbled upon one while playing with friends, it sparked a developing interest in the prickly mammals.

'Felix loved all wildlife, but something about hedgehogs fascinated him,' says his mother Jane. 'He had several hedgehog books, learnt all about their current plight and became known among friends and neighbours as an expert on them.'

'Other than being a professional cricket or football player, conservation was the only career Felix ever talked about. He wanted to work with animals and preserve the environment.'

After finishing his first year at secondary school, Felix was on holiday with family friends in France when he contracted a rare and virulent strain of meningitis. He was taken to hospital, but died the following day.

Last year, on the day he would have turned 15, his mother, father and older brother Dan set up the Felix Byam Shaw Foundation (felixbyamshawfoundation.org) to commemorate Felix by creating and supporting social projects that reflect his passions and values.

One of these is the Felix Hedgehog Project, which is launching at their home in north Oxford today (21 April).

'Felix showed such enthusiasm and commitment towards hedgehogs that we wanted to capture that and do something to carry forward his interest,' says Jane.

The project's vision is to create a better and safer habitat for Britain's wild animals, with a particular focus on hedgehogs, using

the family's own garden as an example of a hedgehog-friendly space.

In addition, the Byam Shaws have identified a 130-acre zone around their home, which they hope to turn into a hedgehog preservation area.

'For a healthy population to thrive, hedgehogs need a space roughly equivalent to three golf courses,' says Jane.

'The area we are working with is half private gardens and half institutions, including two Oxford colleges, a school and the university parks. With these partners, we hope to create a wildlife corridor where hedgehogs and other animals can move freely.'

'Our aim is for everyone to work together

'Felix showed such commitment towards hedgehogs that we want to capture that'

to ensure the survival of the hedgehog by taking small, practical steps, such as linking their gardens, keeping certain areas wild and untidy, using minimal chemicals, providing food and water, and removing hazards such as open drains, garden netting and footballs nets.'

The most important part of this, and possibly the biggest challenge, is encouraging everyone to connect their land so the little mammals can roam freely without crossing roads.

'There are lots of double-bricked walls around here that are hard to open up,' says Jane, 'but with money from the Felix Foundation, we recently bought a power drill with a diamond bit. We have tried it



HELPING HAND The Byam Shaws have created a hedgehog-friendly garden by drilling holes in walls (above) and creating a log-pile feeding zone (top)

out on one of our walls and have successfully made a hedgehog-sized hole.

'At the project's launch, we want to encourage neighbours to let us make holes in their garden walls and fences by showing them ours and reassuring them that it is only a small gap, barely the size of a CD, and that it is unobtrusive and won't cause any damage or security problems.'

Visiting hedgehogs have also been provided with a drinking area in the form of several ponds, a feeding zone, made up of piles of wet logs where their favourite bugs and insects can be found, and a couple of hibernation houses, made from old pallets covered with branches and logs.

Jane is particularly pleased with a newly acquired footprint tunnel, an innovative piece of kit that tracks mammals.

'It's a Toblerone-shaped tunnel that you put food inside,' she says. 'The animals then walk over an inkpad to reach the food, so you can keep track of who is visiting your garden. We are going to use it to conduct a hedgehog survey in May, which we plan to repeat every year to see what difference our project is making to the local population.'

Since Felix's death, Jane has become increasingly involved in conservation, attending a national hedgehog conference, as well as sharing her experience of establishing the Felix Hedgehog Project with local community groups in the hope of inspiring others to do something similar.

Creating the project has not only done something positive for conservation in memory of Felix but has also enabled his family to get closer to one of his childhood passions.

'Felix would be proud of this project, and that's part of the point of it,' says Jane. 'We are doing something he would have loved to have done himself.'

Use your plot to help save the planet

Get involved in our campaign

- 1 Have you spotted a hedgehog in your garden, or made a hole in your fence to help them move around? Tweet a pic @waitrose using #gardenpower
- 2 To register a hedgehog sighting and be part of the BIG hedgehog map, go to hedgehogstreet.org.
- 3 To find out more about how to help locally and for details of Hedgehog Awareness Week, which is running from 1-7 May, visit britishhedgehogs.org.uk. This year the focus is on garden equipment, such as strimmers, encouraging people to check the area carefully before using these machines to avoid injuring any animals.

#gardenpower

For a chance to win a hedgehog house from waitrosegarden.com, tweet a picture of your garden wildlife @waitrose using #gardenpower. Ts&Cs apply.

Here are two of our favourites...

Dee
@Perk1nz

@waitrose We had a little visitor last year. A spoon rest made the perfect food bowl.
#gardenpower

Erica Wicks
@lunchtimelady

Hedgehog eating cat food!
@waitrose #gardenpower.
This is one of 3 that I feed.
@BeingBoycie @hedgehogsociety