



Scientific Name:

Atelerix algirus

Synonym:

Erinaceus algirus

English:

Algerian hedgehog

Maltese:

il-qanfud

While there are around seventeen different species of hedgehogs known around the world, the Algerian Hedgehog is the only species found in the Maltese Islands. It grows to around 25cm in length and has a life expectancy of around 3-4 years. It is easily recognised by its spines, which are actually hollow hairs filled with air pockets and made with stiff keratin on the outside. Having thousands of these durable spines, hedgehogs use them as a defence mechanism against predators. In fact, on feeling threatened, the hedgehog rolls into a tight ball, subsequently causing its spines to point outwards.

The Algerian hedgehog has a light coloured face and a distinct lack of spines on the crown of its head. Its ears are highly visible and are relatively large in size, whilst the underbelly varies in colour and is often either brown or white.

The English name 'hedgehog' came into use during the Middle Ages from the word 'hegge' meaning hedge, since this creature is found regularly in hedgerows; and 'hogge' meaning hog, because of its pig-like snout. The hedgehog's diet usually consists of a variety of insects, and occasionally, also small vertebrates.

The Algerian Hedgehog is confined to Malta, Gozo and Tunisia (excluding Djerba), although it has now been introduced elsewhere. The greatest human threat to these small mammals is cars; many are run over whilst attempting to cross a road. In Malta, the hedgehog has a near threatened status and has been protected since 1993 through environmental legislation.