



Throughout the short, cold days of winter, some animals fully hibernate for many months, while others go into a deep hibernation sleep – like bears for example. Hibernating animals are able to slow their heart rate and breathing down, as well as lower their body temperature. Before hibernating, many animals eat as much as they can so that the extra fat will help them last without food until the spring. Here are some of our favourite sleepy heroes.



Bears
Bears might be the first animal you think of when hibernation is mentioned. There are actually four different species of bear that hibernate, or sleep over winter; brown, grizzly, black and polar. During hibernation, a black bear's heart can drop from 40-50 to just eight beats per minute, and they can last as long as 100 days without eating or drinking! Female bears often have their cubs during this time and will feed them in their den until the warmer spring arrives.



Hedgehogs
Did you know that in the UK, hedgehog numbers have fallen by about 50% in the last 20 years? Hedgehogs usually hibernate from October/November through to March/April. A hedgehog's heart rate is usually around 190 beats per minute but drops to just 20 during hibernation and its body temperature will drop from 35°C to just 10°C!



Bats
All 17 species of bat in the UK hibernate in their roosts. You might think all bats hang out in caves but around three-quarters of UK bats have evolved to roost in trees. Because of a lack of suitable mature trees, you might find hibernating bats in man-made structures such as old brick walls or even in the roof of your house.



Bees
Sadly, when the temperature drops and food becomes scarce, males and worker bees usually die. However, the queen survives by hibernating in a hole in the ground, a tree stump or under leaves. She will emerge six to eight months later, warm up and then create a whole new colony of bees.

What do I do if I find a hibernating animal?
If you have any concerns regarding UK wildlife you find, please contact your local wildlife rescue centre.

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