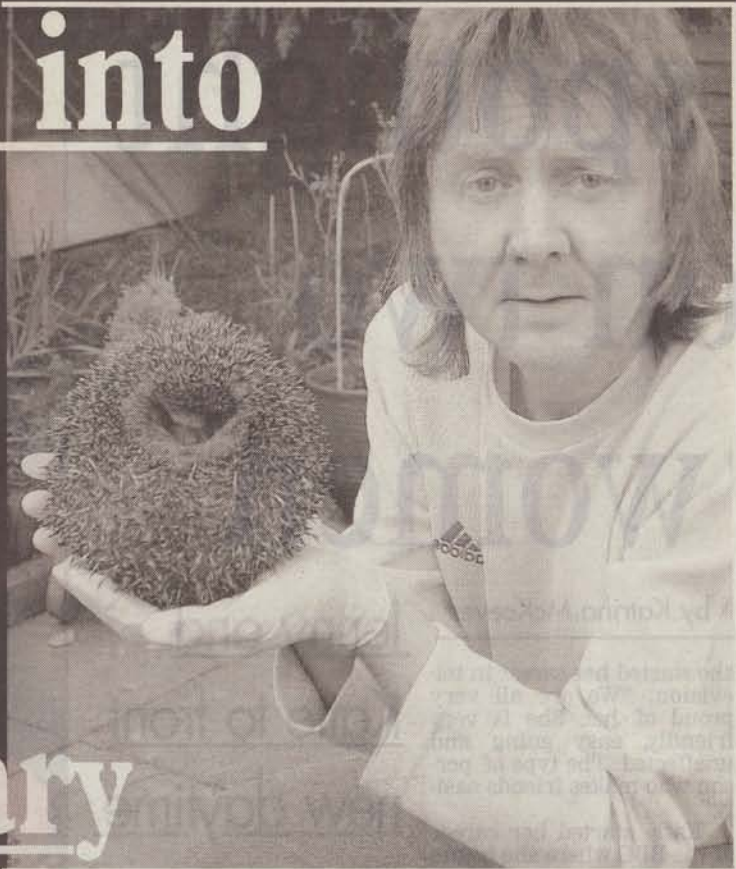


# Martin springs into action as cold snap drives local wildlife to seek sanctuary



NEXT time you moan about Wilmslow's winter weather spare a thought for the town's wildlife. Because the last few months of cold snaps followed by unusually warm conditions has played havoc with Wilmslow's population of hibernating creatures – hedgehogs, bats and dormice. The fluctuating temperatures have tricked the animals to waking from their slumber too early, when there is little food available, and the prospect of dying from starvation. But one lucky hedgehog fell into the hands of wildlife expert Martin Turner, of Cranford Road, who runs the South Manchester Wildlife Rescue charity. It was almost dead when he found it but his care – which included antibiotics, feeding by a syringe and even being placed in an incubator – the prickly animal has made a full recovery and will be released back into the wild this week. Martin said: "When there is mild weather it affects

by Alex Scapens

the body clock of hibernating animals. They wake up and begin moving around but their survival depends on the availability of food. "If there is then a sudden cold snap (like the one at the beginning of March) they can't find the food and use up valuable energy and strength moving around looking. "So it has been a funny year. Hedgehogs are not as common as they have been around here, there have been fewer sitings. "The hedgehog I have has only just been let out into the garden to feed itself on slugs and worms. If all goes well I'll release it into the wild." This February had been relatively mild but then March began with snow and ice, which subsided into warm, almost summery conditions before the temperature fell sharply again.

Martin says animals need a full stomach to hibernate so when woken can find it difficult to return to this state. He added birds, particularly blue tits, have also been affected and have started nesting early when less food is available. Bats have yet to be spotted and are expected to appear in April when it will be seen if their numbers have declined because of the weather. But Martin has more pressing concerns before then after resurrecting his unnamed hedgehog. He said: "I never give my animals names as then you become too attached to them. "She was on death's door when I found her, and was that weak she just lay on her side. I had to feed her liquidised food in a syringe for seven days. "Us humans don't get too affected by bad weather as we can just wrap up warm but it is very important for animals as it dictates their behaviour."