

TRANSITIONS: WELCOME CARES

In contrast to the discomfort of caring about hedgehogs in Aotearoa/New Zealand, in many spaces of the UK, my attachments would prove to make my movements through the world smoother. My arrival in the UK was marked from the outset by the depth of concern some humans expressed for hedgehogs. Even my initial arrival in the country was assisted by my welcomed cares for hogs. Excited to have arrived, I gushed to the customs officer when she inquired about my purpose for entering the country that I was arriving to do fieldwork for my PhD. She stiffened and, with a suddenly formal tone, informed me that I was on the wrong visa for such work.

“What are you studying?” she asked with a frown, her eyes fixed on me.

“Aah, hedgehogs . . .” I said, going suddenly numb as I realized I might not be allowed in the country, that my first period of fieldwork might be over before it had begun. Mindlessly, I kept talking, “. . . umm, you know, I’m just here for a first round of research, on hedgehogs and conservation, and sort of, um, how it all works and the challenges and things.”

To my amazement, she visibly softened as I rambled, her eyebrows raising as she leaned in. “Hedgehogs! Oh, I love hedgehogs!” She looked wistful and concerned all at once. “They’re in decline, aren’t they?”

“Yeah, around 95% since the 1950s.”

“You shouldn’t really be here on that visa. Just make sure you don’t leave and try to re-enter on it—you might not get back in. And if do return for more research, make sure you’ve got your paperwork in order.” She pointed through the customs blockade and into the main body of the airport. “Now go, get in there and save some hedgehogs!”

I thanked her and, feeling a great wave of relief, walked through the blockade. Lifting my eyes, apparently to the great hedgehog in the sky, I whispered, “Thanks.”

I had landed in a country in which my research subject was widely adored. This would make much of my UK fieldwork, from which the following three chapters are drawn, remarkably smooth and welcoming. However, despite this fierce and relatively widespread (although not universal) British love of hogs, hedgehogs themselves were struggling. In this, I had moved from the relative flourishing of hedgehogs in Aotearoa/New Zealand—a flourishing that continued despite emerging societal opposition to the presence of these spiky critters—to a country in which hogs are much loved yet in which people had—as yet—been unable to forge the sorts of landscapes these creatures seem to need.

There is a certain ease—a happiness, to use Sara Ahmed’s framing—of having one’s cares align with those of the other humans with whom one spends time. Ahmed recalls that the root of “happiness” is the Middle English “hap” or chance (2010, 22). Happiness, she notes, is shaped by our various alignments with structures of oppression and advantage, be they of race, gender, class, or nationality. “The world,” Ahmed notes, “‘houses’ some bodies more than others, such that some bodies do not experience the world as resistant” (2010, 11). Alongside—and entangled with—the influences of race, gender, class, and nationality, I wonder about the ways in which ones’ cares might also influence one’s hap in powerful—even border surmounting—ways.



Figure 2.1

Hedgehog footprints from Redcliffe, Bristol City.

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The Contradictions of Care in Conservation Practice

By: Laura McLauchlan

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