

Robot mowers threaten hedgehogs

Germany

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A hedgehog named Henriette who narrowly survived an encounter with a robot lawnmower may end up saving many of her species from the threat posed by the machines.

A badly wounded Henriette was brought in to the Bonn veterinary surgery of Ansgar Waldmann. "She was virtually scalped," he told *The Times*. "We gave her antibiotics and painkillers."

Alerted by a newspaper report on the case, a lawnmower manufacturer dis-

patched an engineer to interview Dr Waldmann and inspect Henriette.

"He wanted to know how big she is, how heavy, where exactly the injuries are. He was seriously interested in improving the machines to prevent it happening again," he said.

"They're going to use the measurements to construct a dummy and run their robots over it. She's like a martyr, except she didn't die."

Wildlife experts have warned that the growing popularity of robot lawnmowers poses a threat to hedgehogs. The market for the machines is

booming, with Europe-wide sales rising 40 per cent between 2016 and 2017.

Hedgehogs often fail to see the slow-moving robots as a danger. When they do, they roll into a spiky ball, which offers little protection from the blades.

"Every year hundreds of hedgehogs across Germany die as a result of injuries [like these]," said Martina Gehret, a hedgehog expert at the Bavarian wildlife protection group LBV. "As most mown animals are simply thrown away, we expect that there is a large number of unreported cases."

Henriette has recovered from her injuries after ten days of treatment. "She became so lively that we were able to release her in the wild again," Dr Waldmann said.

