



DOBHARCHÚ

OTTER

Lutra lutra



The little stars on this map represent the distribution of Otters throughout Ireland. Each square on the map is equivalent to 100 kilometres by 100 kilometres.

Not very many people have seen an otter. This is a pity, for it is one of our most graceful and attractive animals. Looking like an overgrown stoat, the otter has a long body and tail and short legs. It is a semi-aquatic creature, equally at home on land or in the water. The otter is a wonderful swimmer with a body perfectly suited to underwater activity. Its coat is waterproof and with webbed toes and a long tail for a rudder, it can swim effortlessly in search of prey, such as coarse fish, eels and frogs, etc. Large lungs enable it to take a deep breath which keeps it going under the water for three minutes or more. Out of the water, an otter will hunt for rabbits, mice, voles and birds. Otters live near water, beside lakes, rivers and streams. They make a home called a "holt" in a bank with the entrance under the water or it may be in

an old rotten tree-stump. The mother otter has a litter of one to three "whelps" which are born blind. The babies remain in the holt for about eight weeks after birth and both parents hunt to feed them. After this period, the whelps are taught to swim. The strange thing is that they are not too keen to take to the water. They have to be coaxed to follow the mother otter across shallow water. Sometimes the babies have to be pushed down the river bank. Once in the water, they soon become expert at catching their own food. Otters are very playful and even when they are fully grown, they love to slide down muddy banks into the water. Otters are a protected animal but are often harmed by water pollution, so make sure to never pollute water.

PROTECT OUR WILDLIFE – PLEASE DO NOT LITTER