

EASÓG

STOAT

Mustela erminea

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The Irish stoat is an elegant little animal with a long slender body and neck, short legs and a black-tipped tail. Many people call it a weasel but there are not weasels in Ireland. Its coat is reddish-brown above with white or yellowish underparts. Stoats live in woods, high moorland, mountains and open country where there are walls, hedges and ditches. Like other furry animals, stoats spend a lot of daylight hours sleeping, emerging at night to hunt. However, they can sometimes be seen frolicking in the sunshine, jumping dancing, turning somersaults and wriggling like a snake. Although stoats are so playful, they are very skilled and fierce killers! They will attack rats, mice, birds, leverets and animals such as rabbits which are much bigger than themselves. When confronted by a

stoat, a rabbit is often so terrified that it becomes paralysed with fear and may even die of fright! Because they destroy huge numbers of rodents in this way, stoats are much more beneficial than harmful. The stoat itself has enemies such as owls, foxes, cats, dogs and people who tend poultry and game. Stoats breed once a year, mother stoat producing a litter in March/April. The stoat nursery may be a hold in a bank, a hollow tree trunk, a rock crevice or a rabbit's burrow. There may be up to ten babies in a litter, blind for the first nine days. They develop very quickly and, in no time at all, they can follow their mother when she goes hunting. Stoats are very inquisitive animals and, if anything catches their attention, they will stand upright folding their paws over their chests.



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