

FACT FILE:

Body: Long & slender
Colour: Brown fur on back, paler underside
Length: Head to body: 10-120cm
Tail - 40-45cm
Weight: Male - 10.1kg
Female 7kg
Food: Butterfish, rockling, eels, coarse fish, sea urchins.
Additional features:
Small ears
Long thick tail
Webbed feet

Otter

Lutra lutra

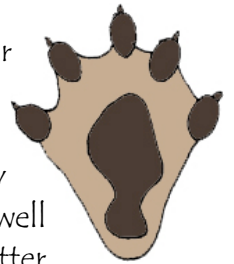
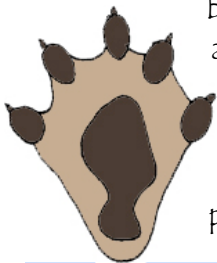


Photo: Sarefo

The Otter - *Lutra lutra*

The river otter (*Lutra lutra*) is the only otter to be found in Ireland. Its name in Irish "maḍra uisce" translates as "water dog". It can be found in streams, rivers, lakes, estuaries and along the coast. It is quite shy and often the only clue of an otter's existence is the presence of otter tracks and spraints (droppings). Spraint heaps can be found on grassy mounds along the water's edge, usually along well worn tracks where streams enter

the sea or where otters cross waterways. The spraints are usually black and full of fish bones, beetle wings and feathers. Otters are usually nocturnal (come out at night), but are sometimes seen during the day. They need a good supply of clean, fresh water nearby so that they can clean their fur regularly, as well as a good supply of food. They can live for around 10 years and have a litter of two or three cubs. They live in areas of good vegetation away from humans, which provide a safe place to live and hide.



Giant Otter

The largest otter in the world (not found in Ireland) is the Giant Otter *Pteronura brasiliensis*. It is a native of South America. It is an endangered species and is very rare. This otter can reach up to 6 ft (1.8m) in length and weigh 34 kg. In the wild it has a lifespan of about 12 years and upto 21 years in captivity. Its fur is chocolate brown in colour with a white patch on its neck. It is well suited to life underwater as its fur is waterproof, its feet are large and webbed and it can close its ears while it dives. The otter's eye are large, which help it to find food underwater. It feeds on crabs, snakes and catfish. Each year the female Giant Otter gives birth to 1-5 young otters in an underground den. They cannot swim when they are born but are taught by their mother after about two months.



Photo: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Marshall Jones