

Otter

Description

Northern Ireland has a healthy population of otters with a slight decline in the past 20 years. Otters are good indicators of water quality as they need fresh unpolluted water and a good supply of food. Dense, undisturbed areas of bankside vegetation are also essential to provide cover when the animal is resting during the day and for breeding purposes. The otter has a long streamlined body with very short legs, webbed feet and a thick, muscular tail. The head is broad and flattened with small eyes and ears. When swimming underwater, the otter can close its nostrils and ears. The otter has two coat layers. The long shiny guard hairs acts as a waterproof coat and the soft thick under fur keeps the otter warm.

The otter must have access to freshwater to wash seawater from their coats otherwise the fur becomes clogged with salt crystal, losing its ability to keep warm. Cubs (up to four) are usually born during the summer months in an underground den and stay with their mothers for about a year. Otters can live for up to 10 years and feed mainly on fish, frogs and crayfish, though other prey such as small birds may be taken.



Distribution

Fermanagh lakes and rivers associated with the River Foyle are good places to see otters. They are hard to see as they are nocturnal. However it is easy to see where otters have been present as they leave droppings to mark their territory. These can be found on rocks, log, etc.

Action

Implementation of the Northern Ireland habitat action plans for Mesotrophic Lakes, Eutrophic Standing Waters and Marl Lakes

In 2001, EHS commissioned a survey of otter distribution in Northern Ireland.

Further Information

<http://www.habitas.org.uk/priority/species.asp?item=5133>

MLA Species Champion