

News release

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Wriggle down to Hyde Park and help scientists find out the best way to woo a worm



Have a go at 'worm charming' in London's Hyde Park this Saturday (31 October) and help scientists as they try to find the best way to woo a worm at the launch of the Earthworm Society of Britain (ESB). The new natural history group has been funded by the Open Air Laboratories (OPAL) project following the success of its national Soil and Earthworm Survey.

Worm charming competitions have been held around Britain for many years, with the world championships taking place in Cheshire each summer. The experiment in Hyde Park will test some of the most commonly used techniques to see which activity yields the most worms. Visitors could try their hand at 'twanging', stamping or even singing in a bid to encourage the park's wriggly inhabitants to the surface.

Emma Sherlock, ESB President, Natural History Museum, said, "We hope to increase awareness and understanding of these under-valued little creatures. Thousands of people have taken part in the OPAL Soil and Earthworm Survey so the Society has been set up to help people develop their interest further."

OPAL offered funding to establish the ESB in recognition of the invaluable work that natural history groups contribute to biodiversity monitoring. OPAL also wants to find ways of nurturing the interest in nature it is generating through its programme of activities, including five national surveys, the first of which was about soil and earthworms. Through the ESB, members will be able to meet experts and go on field trips, plus they will have the opportunity to hone their skills so that they can contribute records to national databases and increase knowledge of earthworm biodiversity.

Nick Baker, Patron, Earthworm Society of Britain, said, "Aristotle and Charles Darwin were both big earthworm fans, but these days most people don't give these humble creatures a second thought. They are

an incredibly important aspect of soil health as by churning it up they improve its fertility; which in turn is great news for plants, animals and ultimately us.”

The worm charming event in Hyde Park runs from 10.45am to 2pm, with charming commencing at 11am. Participants can sign up on the day or in advance by following the link at www.earthwormsoc.org. All other enquiries can be emailed to e.sherlock@nhm.ac.uk.

The OPAL programme has been awarded a grant of £11.7 million from the Big Lottery Fund to inspire people to engage with the natural world around them. Information about its range of national and regional activities can be found www.OPALexploreNature.org

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Notes to editor

1. **Image available in high resolution format.** Caption: *ESB Patron, Nick Baker, with one of the UK's 27 worm species*
2. The ESB has been formed as part of the OPAL support programme for natural history societies, led by the Natural History Museum. Details can be found at <http://www.opalexploreNature.org/?q=SocietyHelp>
3. It costs just £5 to join the ESB. Members will receive a biannual newsletter and invitations to special events such as a VIP behind-the-scenes tour of the Natural History Museum's earthworm collections. More information can be found at www.OPALexploreNature.org
4. Open Air Laboratories (OPAL) is a new nation-wide partnership initiative that will inspire communities to discover, enjoy and protect their local environments. It aims to create a new generation of nature-lovers by stimulating interest through local and national projects which are accessible, fun and relevant to anyone who wants to take part
5. OPAL will provide the skills and materials needed for the first community-led study of the world around us.
6. For more information, please visit www.OPALexploreNature.org
7. The Big Lottery Fund's Changing Spaces programme was launched in November 2005 to help communities enjoy and improve their local environments. The programme funds a range of activities from local food schemes and farmers markets, to education projects teaching people about the environment. Imperial College London (the leading OPAL partner) was awarded a **£11,760,783** Changing Spaces grant in August 2007
8. The Big Lottery Fund, the largest of the National Lottery good cause distributors, has been rolling out grants to health, education, environment and charitable causes across the UK since its inception in June 2004. It was established by Parliament on 1 December 2006. Full details of the work of the Big Lottery Fund, its programmes and awards are available on the website: www.biglotteryfund.org.uk