

## **Press release**

4 September 2012

### **Sending out an S.O.S. to Milton Keynes – Save Our Soil survey**

#### **Scientists need your help to discover more about the humble earthworm**

Although most people know earthworms are good for the soil, not much is known about different species and where they can be found. This is your chance to take part in the nationwide Soil and Earthworm survey, part of the Open Air Laboratories (OPAL) project, and tell scientists which species are wriggling around in a garden or green space near you. The survey is free, quick and easy to do and fun for the whole family.

Dr David Jones of the Natural History Museum says: “Earthworms don’t get a lot of attention, but they’re really important. Soils are easily eroded and damaged but earthworms help to keep them healthy and productive so we can grow our food. This survey is a fantastic way to get your hands dirty and really get to know our wriggly friends. Data from completed surveys will be added to existing research to help scientists like me understand more about soil and earthworms in your area.”

OPAL is the largest science project of its kind, led by Imperial College London, in collaboration with the Natural History Museum and other leading UK institutions. Since its launch in the spring of 2009, the OPAL Soil and Earthworm Survey has collected more than 4,000 results from across the UK. However, there is still vital information missing in the Milton Keynes area and OPAL scientists need your help to find out which earthworm species live near you.

Earthworms are vital to the environment. They do an essential job improving soil aeration and recycling nutrients. They are also an important food source for birds, hedgehogs and many other wild animals.

To take part, send an email to [opalsoil@imperial.ac.uk](mailto:opalsoil@imperial.ac.uk) and request a survey pack. The pack will arrive in the post containing everything you need to collect and identify earthworms, as well as instructions on how to submit your results online. You can also download the field guide, including worm identification manual, and workbook for free from [www.opalexplornature.org/takingpart](http://www.opalexplornature.org/takingpart)

To find out more about the survey and its findings so far go to [www.opalexplornature.org/SoilSurveyResults](http://www.opalexplornature.org/SoilSurveyResults)

#### **Ends**

#### **Notes to editors**

1. Open Air Laboratories (OPAL), led by Imperial College London, ([www.imperial.ac.uk](http://www.imperial.ac.uk)), is a nationwide partnership initiative that inspires communities to discover, enjoy and protect their local environment. 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. OPAL provides the skills and materials needed for the first national community-led study of the world around us. For more information, please visit [www.OPALexplorenature.org](http://www.OPALexplorenature.org)

2. The Big Lottery Fund's Changing Spaces programme was launched in November 2005 to help communities enjoy and improve their local environment. 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
3. The Big Lottery Fund, the largest of the National Lottery good cause distributors, has been providing 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](http://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk)

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