



Get A Wriggle On To Take Part In The National Soil & Earthworm Survey

31 March 2009

Try your hand at worm identification or learn how to test the health of your garden soil by taking part in the first-ever national soil and earthworm survey,

The national environmental initiative, OPAL, which is delivered regionally by the University of Plymouth and Moor Trees, has launched the nationwide research project to look at the distribution of different soils and earthworm species across England. It is the first time that a research project has mapped the two elements at the same time.

People across Devon and Cornwall can contribute by taking part in a series of fun and educational events during April and May, as OPAL Community Scientist, Bethan Stagg explains; ***“We will be conducting field surveys, soil ecology investigations and soil workshops in various locations across Devon. These events are family-friendly and will include lots of fun activities such as worm charming, making clay models and learning about wattle and daub techniques. This is a fun and educational way for everyone to get their hands dirty in the name of scientific research.”***

Dr Maria Donkin of the University of Plymouth says this is the South West’s chance to contribute to important national environmental research; ***“Surprisingly little is known about soil characteristics, or the effect it has on the creatures that live in it. Soil is vital for plants and for food production, carbon storage, water regulation and, of course, providing a home for a vast array of life, including earthworms. These tiny, but fascinating creatures play an important role in soil management, by recycling plant nutrients and improving drainage.”***

The OPAL soil and earthworm survey is the latest initiative to be organised by Open Air Laboratories, which aims to bring scientists and the community closer together, encouraging people to get back in touch with nature through exploring and studying their local environments. The University of Plymouth is one of nine regional universities which successfully bid for funding to deliver the OPAL locally.

For full details of activities, dates and venues for the soil survey are included below. Free training courses for schools, colleges and other groups are also available by contacting Bethan Stagg on 0845 456 9803 / 07866149773 or email bethan.stagg@moortrees.org

- Ends -

Notes to Editors

Please direct any media enquiries to University of Plymouth Senior Press Officer, Karen Mason on 01752 588002.

About OPAL

The Open Air Laboratories (OPAL) network 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

OPAL will provide the skills and materials needed for the first community-led study of the world around us.

For more information, please visit www.OPALexplorenature.org

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

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

National soil and earthworm survey events

APRIL

Sun 5th 2 - 4 Parke Walled Garden Open Afternoon Try your hand at the soil and earthworm survey and see what's going on in Bovey Climate Action's community garden at Parke now the growing season is underway. Contact Bethan Stagg 07866149773.

Sun 26th 10 - 4 Hillyfield, Harbournford Soil and earthworm surveys in a beautiful Dartmoor location. The surveys will be used for a comparison of soil ecology between one of our woodlands and nearby grassland. There will also be a slideshow on soil ecology. **Transport available from University of Plymouth Students' Union.** Contact Bethan Stagg 07866149773.

MAY

Sun 3rd 2 - 4.30 Vicary's Fields (Newton Abbot) The Vicary's Field community gardening group (part of Transition Newton Abbot) will be investigating the soil ecology of their newly acquired allotment site. There will be family soil-related craft activities, refreshments and a 'build a shelter' workshop too. Contact Jacqui Brodie on 07905 089925.

Sun 9th 10.30 - 12 Kit Hill (Callington) Join in soils and earthworm surveys with Tamar Valley Wildlife Group, on a working farm in a scenic location overlooking Kit Hill.

There will also be family activities, from soil pigment painting to microscopes to investigate, plus refreshments. Contact Caroline Vallumy 01579370411.

Tues 26th	10 - Ocombe Farm 12.30 (Paignton)	We'll be digging down and find out about the earthworms and soil of Ocombe. Our findings will be uploaded onto the national OPAL website. Then we will create masterpieces, earth painting in varying hues. Activities suitable for ages 5 upwards with accompanying adult help, younger siblings welcome. Cost: £2.50 per child (under 3's free). Booking essential on 01803 606035.
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