

**Press release**

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**Media Information: David Garner 01904 432153**



## **Householders' help sought to stem hedgehog decline**

Researchers from the OPAL (Open Air Laboratories) project at the University of York are asking residents in east Hull to help them to monitor the numbers of one of the UK's most distinctive animals.

They are to conduct a survey in the eastern part of the city to gauge to what extent the hedgehog, whose rural population is declining due to habitat loss and changes in farming, is seeking refuge in urban green spaces, such as gardens and parks.

The exercise organised by scientists in the Environment Department and the Stockholm Environment Institute at the University of York, follows the success of the Slime & Spine 2009 postcard survey in Hull last year.

OPAL is a national partnership initiative that is encouraging people to explore, study and protect their local environments. It has received a grant of £11.75m from Big Lottery Fund to inspire the next nation of nature enthusiasts.

As part of the new study, researchers will attach coloured tags to the spines of hedgehogs in the Marfleet, Greatfield and Kingswood areas of Hull. The tag is harmless to the hedgehog, and will fall off within a few months.

OPAL researcher Sal Hobbs said: "Hedgehogs are nocturnal and fairly shy, making it difficult to investigate how they use the urban landscape such as private gardens. We've already had a fantastic response from the residents of east Hull, and a large number of people have reported that they see hedgehogs in their gardens. Now we are asking for help again, to take this one step further and investigate what the urban hedgehogs are up to.

"We need residents to spot hedgehogs and to tell us the colour of the tag, the letters printed on it and the exact location of the animal. This information will help us to plot a map of where the different hedgehogs are going, how far they travel, and which gardens they choose to visit.

"The information that the community helps us to gather will be extremely valuable in helping to devise conservation measures for this wonderful species."

**ENDS**

**Notes to Editors:**

- [Open Air Laboratories \(OPAL\)](#) is a 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.
- 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.
- More information on the University of York's Environment Department at <http://www.york.ac.uk/depts/eeem/>.
- More information on the Stockholm Environment Institute at the University of York at <http://sei-international.org/>.