

Press release

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Researchers ask: “What’s in your pond?”

A major new survey is launched today to find out which plants and animals inhabit Yorkshire’s lakes and ponds.

The Open Air Laboratories (OPAL) Water Survey in Yorkshire, led by researchers based in the Environment Department and the Stockholm Environment Institute at the University of York, is part of a major investigation across the whole of England. Developed by University College London in partnership with Pond Conservation and Buglife – The Invertebrate Conservation Trust – it encourages people to get out and explore their local ponds and lakes.

Anyone can take part in the survey by identifying weird and wonderful bugs, such as water beetles and pond skaters. Participants will also be asked to carry out some simple tests of water alkalinity and water clarity. The results will contribute to an England and Wales database of water quality in ponds and lakes and help to increase understanding of the animals that live in them.

Ponds and lakes are important wildlife habitats providing a home to many rare species, for example, the rare Mud snail that lives in ponds in Yorkshire.

Sarah West OPAL Community Scientist for Yorkshire says: “Yorkshire was once covered in ponds and lakes, however drainage for agriculture and urban development has led to the loss of many wildlife rich in ponds; making the ponds and lakes left in Yorkshire all the more important.”

The Water Centre at the University College London has taken three-monthly samples of water from ponds and lakes across the country, including Chapman’s Pond, Dringhouses, York, to assess their chemistry, plants and animals. The research has discovered that many ponds are under threat due to pollution damage or neglect.

“We need people to help us find and investigate the ponds and lakes in Yorkshire. We want to find out about the animals and plants in garden ponds as well as ponds and lakes that are in parks and other green spaces,” Sarah West added.

OPAL, in conjunction with Buglife – The Invertebrate Conservation Trust, will be running a number of events about the survey in and around York including: 5 June at Chapmans Pond 11am-4pm and 17 July at Askham Bog 1pm-4pm. For information about the survey and the events contact Sarah West (OPAL Community Scientist) on 01904 434577 or visit www.sei.se/opal, or Vicky Kindemba (Freshwater and Farming Officer for Buglife) at vicky.kindemba@buglife.org.uk

The OPAL Water Survey is funded by OPAL's grant from the Big Lottery Fund of £11.75m. The project hopes to create a legacy of knowledge and interest in aquatic monitoring which will feed into new campaigns being developed by Pond Conservation in 2011.

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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. Website: 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
- Buglife -The Invertebrate Conservation Trust is the first organisation in Europe devoted to the conservation of all invertebrates, and is actively working to save Britain's rarest bugs, bees, butterflies, ants, spiders, beetles and many more fascinating invertebrates. Launched in April 2004, Buglife currently has eleven members of staff working on diverse projects including the conservation of wildlife on riverbanks and in ditches, and the protection of the White-clawed crayfish. For more information on invertebrates - and what you can do to help these amazing animals - visit www.buglife.org.uk
- 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/>