

**OPAL Yorkshire and Humber
Press Release**

21 August 2008

**Media Information: David Garner 01904 432153
Pictures by Paul Cooper**



Learning about nature the fun way

Children had a whale of time pond-dipping and getting to know mini-beasts at a Family Fun Day at Chapman's Pond in Dringhouses, York, organised as part of a national environmental initiative.

The Open Air Laboratories Network (OPAL), which is supported by the Big Lottery Fund and led in Yorkshire and the Humber by the University of York, staged the event in partnership with the Friends of Chapman's Pond.

Young visitors were invited to join a mini-beast hunt, take part in pond-dipping, and draw a picture of what they found. A water survey team from University College London, and project partners from the Natural History Museum were on hand to answer questions about plants, invertebrates and fish in the pond. The British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) and York Rotters also took part in the event. They offered visitors the chance to learn about how to make brilliant compost at home, and many even came away with their very own dragonfly hat!

The Chapman's Pond area has had problems with vandalism and litter, and the aim of the Fun Day was to encourage people to use the site in a positive way. It publicised OPAL which aims to encourage people to assess the quality of their own environment, as well as recruiting schools and volunteers to take part in national surveys launching next year.

One of the project leaders Dr. Carolyn Snell said: "It was a resounding success, the kids loved the mini-beast hunt, and by the end of the afternoon were able to identify a whole range of different creatures including a water scorpion, and a Brown Hawker dragonfly. We also had two winners in our picture competition."

A steering group including representatives from Natural England, the Environment Agency, Yorkshire Forward, BTCV, the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust and City of York Council, is co-ordinating the OPAL project in the region.

OPAL researchers from the University's Environment Department and the Stockholm Environment Institute are already working with a number of local groups in Tang Hall in York to map the neighbourhood's environmental history. Tang Hall is the first of four communities in Yorkshire and the Humber that will take part in the project. It is hoped that eventually, around 8,000 people across the region will get involved.

The project will produce five survey packs on different environmental topics which will be available for use by schools and community groups in Yorkshire and the Humber. The project aims to produce a community-based environmental report for the region by 2012.

OPAL will be represented at the York Green Festival in Rowntree Park on 31 August, with more pond dipping and mini-beast hunting planned!

Anyone interested in joining OPAL should contact opalproject@york.ac.uk or go to website www.OPALExploreNature.org.

-Ends-

Notes to editors:

- 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, it believes that community participation is vital if the environmental movement is to make a real impact
- The Environment Department at the University of York was founded in 1992, initially to integrate ecological and environmental sciences with environmental economics. The aim was to improve understanding of environmental problems, and how to solve them, through the consideration of both the human dimension and the underpinning science. Its objective is to develop sustainable solutions to environmental problems that are consistent with human aspirations and with global, regional and local institutions and markets. More information at www.york.ac.uk/depts/eeem/
- More information on the Stockholm Environment Institute at York at www.sei.se
- 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