



## Watch out for worms with wildlife presenter Chris Packham

Members of the public sought to help scientists with soil and earthworm research

### News release

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Wildlife Presenter Chris Packham launched the OPAL Soil and Earthworm Survey today in Kensington Gardens. Packham's call to action encouraged as many people as possible to help scientists with essential research into soil and organisms that live in it such as earthworms.



By testing the soil for certain characteristics and identifying their local earthworms, people can help scientists in their research and contribute to the first community-led study of the natural world.

Chris Packham, said, "Earthworms are really undervalued and few people realise the important job they do keeping the soil under our feet nice and healthy. Surprisingly little is known about the different species or their habitats, so this research will be vital to help scientists understand how earthworms are affected by pollutants in the soil and by human activity."

Anyone can take part in the survey by downloading a survey guide and workbook from [www.OPALexplore.org](http://www.OPALexplore.org). Most of the items needed for the survey can be found around the home, and once completed participants can upload their data on an interactive map, showing what others have found in their area as well as nationally.

Dr. Nick Voulvoulis of Imperial College London, Director of the OPAL Soil Centre said, "Soils are taken for granted by the majority of the public, although they are an extremely important part of the environment. With unique biological, chemical and

physical characteristics, soils have many functions that directly benefit our lives and have the ability to support life in them.”

The survey is one of several projects being led by Imperial College London scientists as part of the wider OPAL initiative. OPAL has been awarded a grant of £11.7 million by the Big Lottery Fund to inspire a new generation of nature enthusiasts.

For younger nature enthusiasts with a passion for worms, Buglife has also launched ‘Worm Week’ in support of the OPAL survey today. The wildlife conservation charity is inviting primary schools to take part in a Worm Charming Competition where children will be asked to use imaginative methods to attract earthworms to the soil surface. The school that charms the most worms will win a free Bug Day for the school.

Buglife also has free downloadable teaching resources for primary schools, and a free worm poster on offer which will enable youngsters to find out how important and fascinating worms really are. Schools can also enter their budding poets into a Wonderful Worms Poetry Competition.

**-Ends-**

#### **Notes to editor**

1. **Image caption** - Chris Packham launches the OPAL Soil and Earthworm Survey with the help of Ben Crampton (L) and Chris Williams (R) from St. Albans School. Packham holds a Natural History Museum specimen of *Megascolides australis*, one of the world's longest earthworms.
2. **Image caption** - Chris Packham meets *Megascolides Australis*, one of the world's longest earthworms from the Natural History Museum's collection. Packham was in Kensington Gardens today to launch the OPAL Soil and Earthworm Survey.
3. **Image caption** - OPAL (Open Air Laboratories) has launched a national survey of soil and earthworms today (23/03/09). *Aporrectodea caliginosa*, or the grey worm, is one of the UK's most common species.
4. Image credit – Open Air Laboratories
5. Open Air Laboratories (OPAL) 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
6. OPAL will provide the skills and materials needed for the first community-led study of the world around us.
7. For more information, please visit [www.OPALexplorenature.org](http://www.OPALexplorenature.org)
8. 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
9. 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](http://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk)

10. 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, worms, beetles and many more fascinating invertebrates. Further information on 'Worm Week' – including downloadable resources and information on taking part in the activities - is available on Buglife's website at [www.buglife.org.uk](http://www.buglife.org.uk)



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