OPAL study creates first dataset on pollutants in England’s freshwaters

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For immediate release

SCIENTISTS from the OPAL Water Centre at University College London have published an in-depth summary of results from a pioneering monitoring study at nine lakes across England.

The study represents the first time that some pollutants in England’s freshwaters have been measured on such a scale, or, as in the case of brominated flame retardants, the first time they have ever been measured in English lakes.

The OPAL Water Centre Monitoring Report 2008-2012 explains how the study found that sediments from ponds can reflect local events, national events and even international events such as radioactive fallout from the 1986 accident at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant.

Dr Neil Rose, one of the authors of the report, said: “The data can be used to help illustrate how individual actions can have larger impacts. Our study demonstrates that environmental change is not something that only happens in remote and exotic places but happens all the time where we each live and work.”

Dr Linda Davies, OPAL Director at Imperial College London, said: “The information in this report represents an important first dataset and a critical baseline against which to compare future changes. As such, it is a valuable asset for all those interested in water quality in England, and particularly for local communities who use their lakes for recreation, care about its conservation value and who have shown a keen interest in this study.”

The nine lakes are spread throughout England, from Crag Lough in Northumberland to Slapton Ley in Devon. They were chosen for their interest to local communities, and are affected by diverse circumstances, such as urban and rural settings, proximity to land-fill and subsidence from mining.

Dr Simon Turner, lead author of the report, said: “Such lakes would probably be avoided in ‘traditional’ monitoring schemes so we have provided data on lake types and impacts for which there was little information. This work has also added considerably to the knowledge of some pollutants and our understanding of them in these ecosystems.”

The data collected has also benefitted communities in some of these areas who incorporated it into management strategies or used it in successful applications to restore sites.

The report is available to view and download at www.opalexplornature.org/OPAL-water-report

The water monitoring study ran alongside the OPAL Water Survey and OPAL Metals Survey, which encouraged citizen scientists to collect data. These studies will be analysed in future publications.

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Notes to editors

1. **Open Air Laboratories (OPAL)**, led by Imperial College London (www.imperial.ac.uk), is a nationwide partnership initiative that inspires communities to discover, enjoy and protect their local environment. OPAL provides the skills and materials needed for the first national community-led study of the world around us. Since it began in 2007, OPAL has been funded by a Big Lottery Fund – Changing Spaces grant. For more information, please visit www.opalexplornature.org or follow us on Twitter @OPALNature

2. **University College London** (www.ucl.ac.uk) was founded in 1826 and was the first English university established after Oxford and Cambridge, the first to admit students regardless of race, class, religion or gender and the first to provide systematic teaching of law, architecture and medicine. It is among the world’s top universities, as reflected by its performance in a range of international rankings and tables. According to the Thomson Scientific Citation Index, UCL is the second most highly cited European university and the 15th most highly cited in the world. UCL has nearly 27,000 students from 150 countries and more than 9,000 employees, of whom one third are from outside the UK.

3. **High resolution images** of OPAL activities are available for media to download from our online image library via www.opalexplornature.org/OPALMedia