



The Hogsmill in December 2022



Big temperature swings have produced rapid changes along the Hogsmill this month: a mild start led to a “second spring” with even “dreaded” balsam back in flower; then a last flush of autumn colours on the trees; followed by a first blast of winter chills creating some festive seasonal scenes; and now mild and wet again.



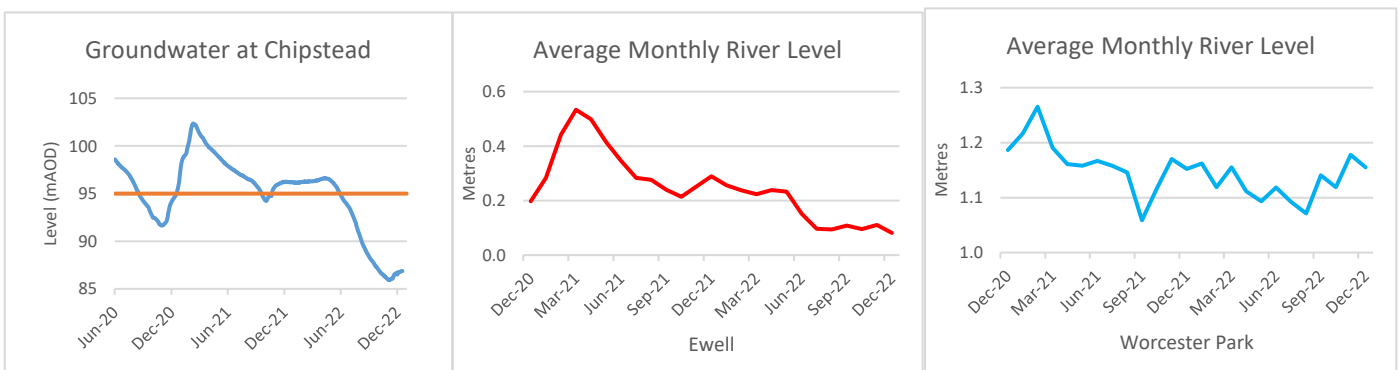
The cold has put more pressure on our wildlife. Birds have reacted in very different ways: some have taken to the treetops to find some sun; others have been practising for “Dancing on Ice” or even taking an ice bath; while others seem to have over-indulged at parties; and some have just hunkered down looking miserable!



This newsletter looks at what is happening to the natural world along the Hogsmill, including the problems it faces and volunteer activities to monitor and restore its habitat, working with the South East Rivers Trust (SERT) and other local groups and alongside the Environment Agency (EA) and local water companies.

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Another dry spell this month so, even with a very wet couple of days, total rainfall this year is set to be about 15 per cent below normal. There's been little recovery in water in the aquifer during the month and the water level and flow have fallen back again along most of the river. But more noticeable was the impact of the cold which not only caused the Hogsmill's ponds and lakes to freeze but also led to large patches of ice forming on the main river, though an exception was downstream of the Hogsmill STW with the temperature of the water at Middle Mill being 13° higher than the air when we did our riverfly survey.



Lower Mill Pond Ewell



Ewell Court Lake



Green Lane Stream confluence

It's been volunteering for the hardy this month. One group ventured to the rural extremes of the catchment to clear brambles overhanging the Bonesgate, bringing more light to the stream and improving access for balsam bashing next year. Another group took part in a litter pick and butterfly egg count at Tolworth Court Farm. While in both cases it was very cold, the sun was shining so we were able to appreciate the riverside landscape at its colourful best and some of the local wildlife.





Park Farm



Tolworth Court Farm



“Budding” brown hairstreak

Pollution has been apparent at a number of outfalls this month, including a short-lived burst at the outfall by the A240 as well as renewed signs at some of the “usual suspects”. But at least we’ve avoided the heavy downpours that often trigger Storm Tank overflows; and soon we’ll know when these have occurred as TW has confirmed that it will put real-time data on overflows on its website from early January. We also had a motorbike dumped in the river leaking fuel, though thanks to EA it was removed quickly.



A240 (Photo thanks to Toby)



Surbiton Hill Park



Portland Road



Malden Manor

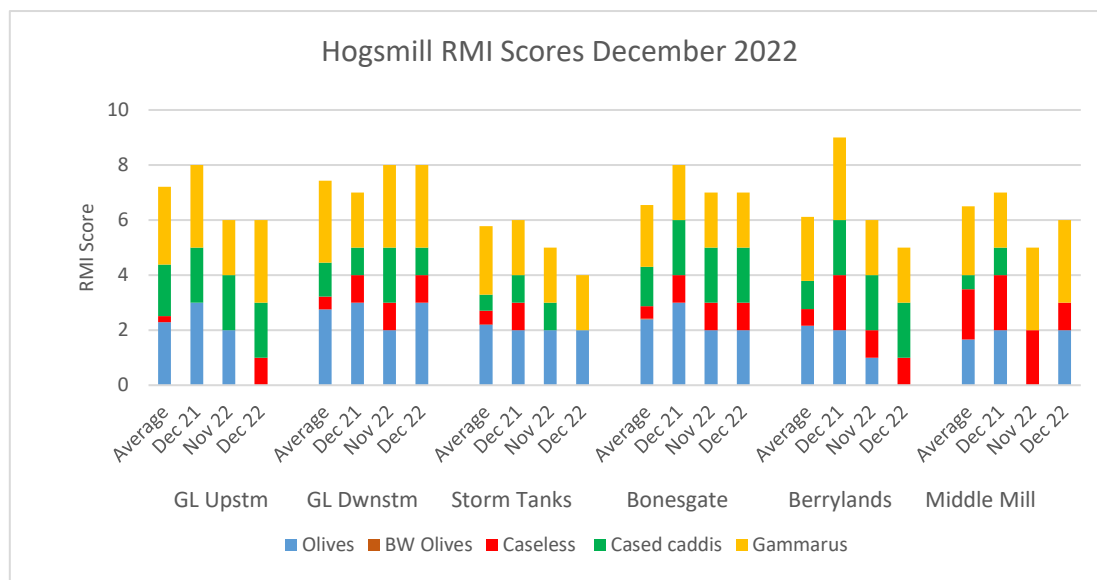
If you see pollution in the river or indications of possible pollution, such as dying fish, please call the EA Hotline: 0800 80 70 60, and ideally take a photo. You can also contact Thames Water on: 0800 316 9800 (option 2); on: www.thameswater.co.uk/help/emergencies/pollution; or on twitter: [@thameswater](https://twitter.com/thameswater).

Hogsmill RMI in December

The River Monitoring Initiative (RMI) is a national scheme that uses “scores” based on counts of a few “water quality sensitive” invertebrates collected in net samples to assess river health.

“Finger-freezing” or wet conditions for sampling this month, but RMI volunteers are hardy and long-serving folk (!) and all 6 main-river sites were surveyed between December 14th and 19th. A milestone was the survey at Berrylands which was the 100th at this site since monitoring began in 2014 and 3 others are not far behind.

River conditions were very different river across the sites, with water temperatures near freezing at 4 but almost balmy at over 10° at the other 2. Scores were down slightly overall, though this *could* be partly because some invertebrates tend to be sluggish and harder to spot in cold water. But perhaps surprising with the turbulent weather, scores and counts were generally fairly similar to last month:



- Scores were down at Ewell Storm Tanks, where the “4” breached the trigger score, and at Berrylands, where a breach was only avoided by valiant efforts to revive and identify some “sleepy” cased caddis and for the first time in 100 surveys no olives were recorded. But at both the water was very cold so this could have affected the counts;
- Results at the “warm water” sites - Middle Mill, from the effects of STW effluent, and Bonesgate, sampled after the big temperature rise - were both reasonably good with a rise in score at the former and November’s above average score and counts maintained at Bonesgate;
- Scores were unchanged from November at the Green Lanes Stream sites, despite the water being particularly cold with patches of ice on the water close to the sampling sites. But at both the score would have been 2 points lower with counts of some species only 1-2 below those actually recorded;
- Amongst the species, olive and gammarus numbers were up slightly overall from the extremely low levels of November though in the case of olives the counts varied widely with some sites much higher but none found at 2. But caddis counts were well down, though this could reflect the difficulties of identification in cold conditions when they are less active.

A Happy Christmas and New Year to all Hogsmillers!