

The Hogsmill in October 2022

Amidst all the turmoil, the Hogsmill has seemed an oasis of calm for most of the month. Bright sunny spells have created beautiful autumn vistas around the river's lakes and ponds, while mild conditions have encouraged many plants back into flower, something the airborne invertebrates have appreciated.



Bourne Hall Lake



Horse Pond



Ewell Court Lake



It's been another disappointing month for river invertebrates. But there seems to be enough in the river to interest the fisherfolk; and kingfishers have returned to explore the refurbished Ewell ponds.

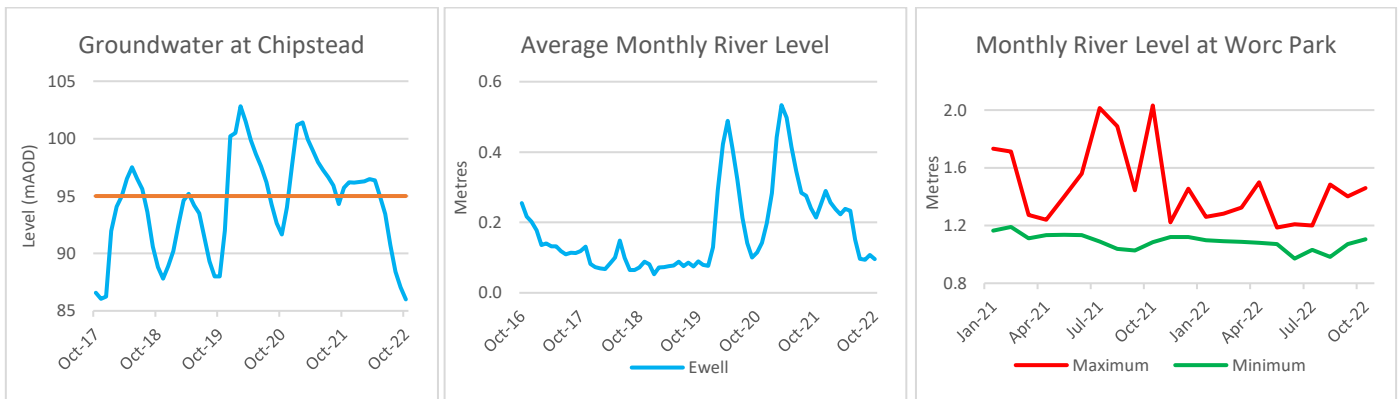


(Photo thanks to Sean)

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.

The Hogsmill in October

Another month with plenty of rain, but even so there's still been less than three-quarters of normal rainfall so far this year. Groundwater in the aquifer has continued to fall and is now at its lowest level for 5 years; and the river level at Ewell is still around the lows of the late 2010s. More positively, most of the rain has been light or steady. The big storm on the 23rd was only the third time this year there's been a potentially damaging water surge of a scale often associated with storm tank overflows; last year there were 20.



The rain has revitalised the Hogsmill's tributaries, which has helped perk up the downstream stretches of the main river adding to the attractiveness of the autumn colours. But the boost to water levels has so far tended to be quite short-lived with silt and gravel banks re-emerging after just a few dry days.



Green Lanes Stream



Bonesgate



Tolworth Brook



Ewell Stepping Stones



Old Malden Lane



Green Lane Bridge



Elmbridge Meadows

The meadows and woods alongside the Hogsmill have shared in the autumn colourfest, though for reasons that are not clear there have been quite a number of tree “casualties”, including one of Ewell’s ancient oaks.



Tolworth Court Farm

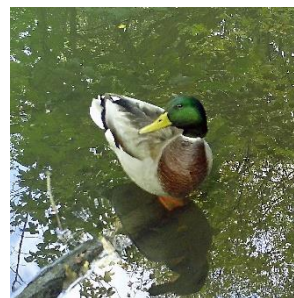


Ewell



Hogsmill Nature Reserve

Volunteer activity this month has been partly “armchair analysis”. Camera traps have been installed at several locations along the river primarily to monitor the spread of water voles but also to provide a record of wildlife more generally. So far the results have mainly highlighted the large populations of moorhens and ducks living along the Hogsmill, as well as night visitors such as rats but not yet “Ratty”!



(Photos thanks to Citizen Zoo)

The look and smell of the Ewell Storm Tanks suggest they were at least partly filled after the storm on the 23rd, though it’s not clear whether they overflowed: real-time data on spills, promised by Thames Water by the end of 2022, is still not available. The one outfall where significant pollution has been observed is by the A240; others have looked relatively clear, though regular rain may have obscured signs of pollution.



Ewell Storm Tanks



A240 downstream

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 October

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

5 main-river sites were surveyed between October 11th and 15th and for the first time since the spring we were able to survey the Tolworth Brook site. But the amount of weed clogging the river – and trays - upstream at Green Lanes made it impossible to obtain reliable counts there.



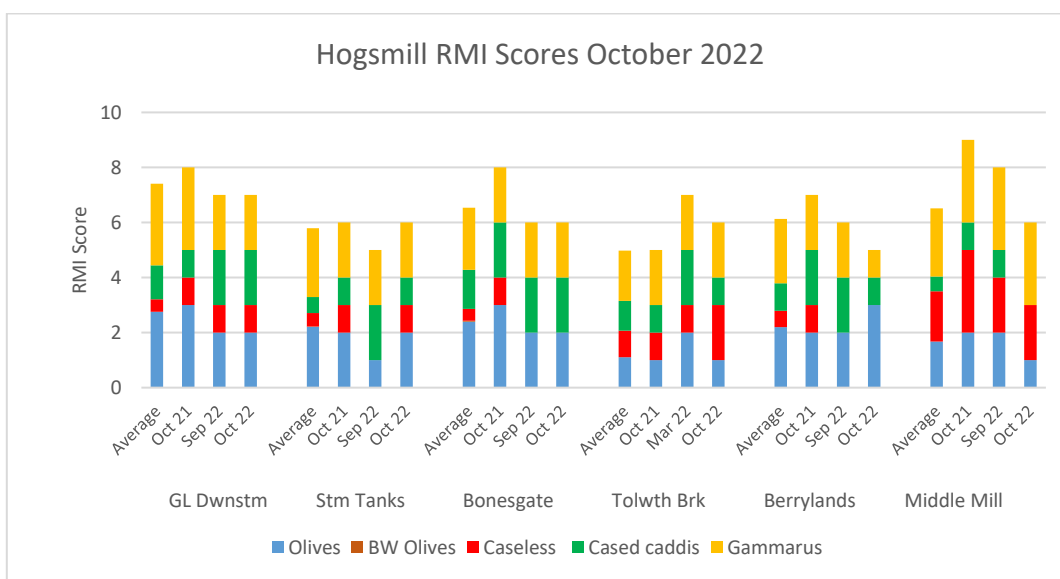
“There’s a river in there somewhere... “



Green Lanes Stream upstream sample

(Photos thanks to Pamela)

Overall the results were broadly similar to - though slightly down on - last month, continuing what has been a disappointing run since the summer. The scores at many sites were well down on last October; and the total number of invertebrates found was the lowest this year. So it looks as if the long dry spell is continuing to have a significant impact on the river:



- While scores at the mid-river sites – downstream at Green Lanes, Ewell Storm Tanks and Bonesgate - have fluctuated slightly in recent months, at all of them the underlying counts of all 4 species have been pretty similar for 4 months in a row so water conditions don't seem to have changed much. At all 3 sites a tiny drop in counts this month would have pushed the score into a lower band so the headline scores paint rather a rosy picture. Particularly striking is that counts of olives, a species especially sensitive to water quality, fell very sharply at all 3 sites in July and have remained at around 10 per cent of their normal levels ever since, drops way above any seen before;
- Counts and scores at Berrylands have been quite volatile in recent months. The score fell this month to an unusually low "5" when, perhaps strangely, hardly anything was found apart from olives. The survey was undertaken soon after heavy rain so the water level was well above normal, something that *could* have affected the collection of the sample;
- The largest change in score this month was the fall to a "6" at Middle Mill, partly driven by a large drop in olive numbers. But scores at around this level seem more in line with what might be expected at a site downstream of a STW with regular CSO spills. Much more surprising are the high scores found in this, and also recent, summers;
- The bright spot this month was Tolworth Brook. As they usually have lower depth/flow than the main river, the tributaries seemed particularly vulnerable to this year's dry spell; a recent "test sample" on the Bonesgate produced extremely low counts. So the score of "6" on the Brook with all 4 species found was encouraging. This is comfortably above the scores being recorded a few years ago, providing further evidence of the beneficial effect of the restoration work done some 5 years ago.