

The Hogsmill in September 2022

A month of mixed emotions. A sad departure was marked beside the Hogsmill, but there have been some exciting arrivals: 101 water voles were released into the river at the start of the month and 3 Sussex cattle have begun another spell of conservation grazing at the Moated Manor site by the river.



“So this is the famous Hogsmill....”

“Yes, and the bankside grub is pretty good!”

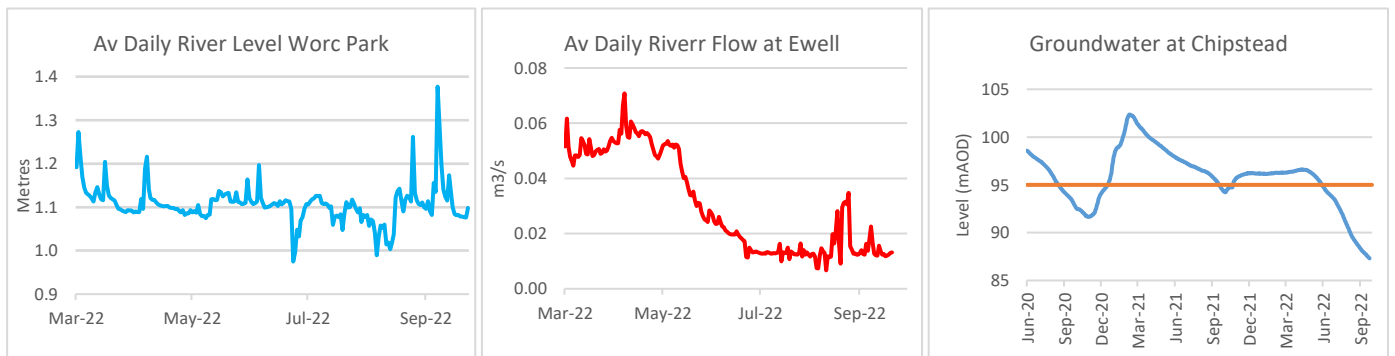
Conditions continue to be challenging for wildlife, but some welcome rain has produced a mini green revival along the Hogsmill. This has provided sustenance for some colourful late-season critters, including quite a recent arrival on these shores, the ivy bee, that seems to be enjoying a good year.



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 September

At last there's been a month with above average rainfall that has given a boost to the level and flow of the river, at least along the mid and downstream sections. Upstream where the flow still relies on augmentation there's been little overall change, though more stability with the repair work at Ewell completed. With the water level in the aquifer continuing to fall it looks like a long wait before the springs start to flow again.



The rain has had a more noticeable effect beside the river: the freshly cut meadows have again turned green and there's been new growth along the banks. Unfortunately a major beneficiary has been Himalayan balsam but the rust fungus, which is being tested as a new approach to control, has infected the trial site. Hopefully next year there'll be less balsam there and the trial can be extended to other areas.



Volunteer activity this month has focused on helping with the water vole re-introduction: moving them to holding pens in the STW site to adjust to their new home, feeding them for a few days and then releasing them. Cameras and other devices are being used to monitor their movements. They may move quite rapidly along the river so keep a discreet eye out; others may be watching too! Be careful with dogs by the water!



A particular concern with the release was that it was into a stretch of river with outfalls that had been badly polluted. These appear much improved following TW investigations, but there is still significant pollution at the mouth of the California Road outfall. The one new pollution incident that has been reported was at the Moor Lane outfall on the Bonesgate prompting TW to attend and deploy a boom at the start of the month.



Barker Close



California Road



Moor Lane
(Photo thanks to Robb)

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 September

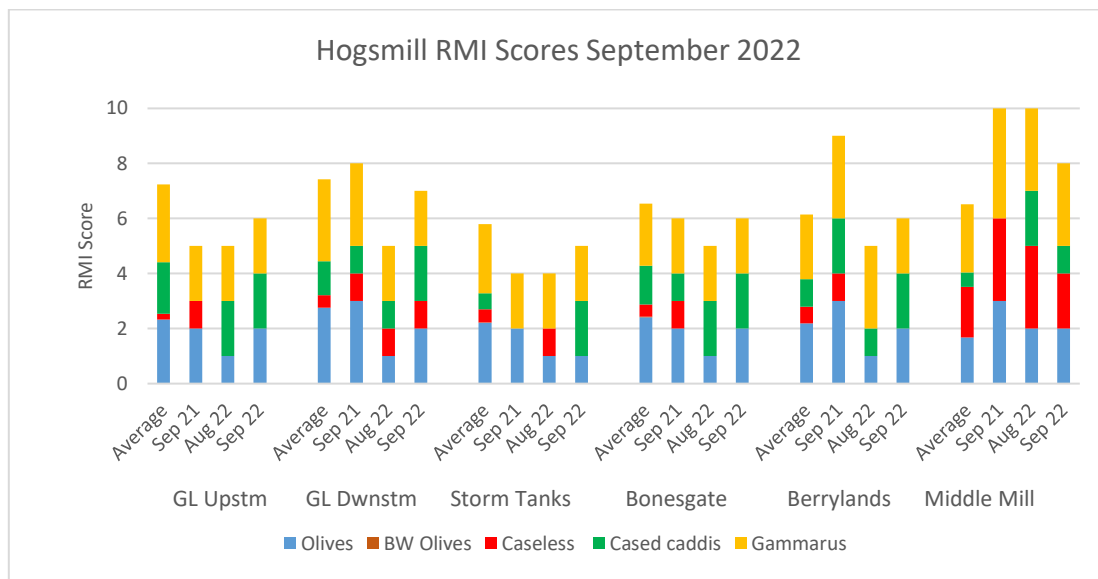
The River Monitoring Initiative (RMI) is a national scheme for monitoring river health that uses “scores” based on counts of certain “water quality sensitive” invertebrates in net samples to assess water quality.

The 6 main-river sites were surveyed between September 14th and 23rd. The samples were subject to greater bankside analysis than usual as they are also being used for more detailed identification as part of the SMART rivers project. In the case of Bonesgate, we also had the benefit of volunteers taking part in a Field Recorders’ Day at Tolworth Court Farm and expert input from the Chair of the National Riverfly Partnership.



The scores at all 5 upstream sites were above August’s very low levels. A boost to counts from “more eyes than usual” *could* have contributed, but only in a couple of cases does it seem possible that this *could* have tipped the score into a higher band. So there look to be “real” rises; perhaps the boost to water levels from

the rain has had a rapid effect. But the scores were still low by historical standards: apart from August there's only been one occasion in the past 4 years where the overall average score for these sites has been lower:



- The sites with the shallowest water - the Storm Tanks and Bonesgate - again had the poorest results, a “5” and (just) a “6”. At both the total number of invertebrates of *all* species collected for the SMART rivers project also looked to be very low; and at both the overall score was more dependent than usual on the cased caddis count. Particularly at Bonesgate there looks to be a trend away from surveys with large numbers of olives and gammarus with an occasional caddis to ones with regular and more caddis and much fewer of the other species. The reason is not clear;
- The improvement on August scores at Berrylands and the Green Lanes sites mainly reflected some recovery from the exceedingly low olive counts in August. Even so olive numbers were still only ¼ - ½ of the long term average; and gammarus numbers were also extremely low by historical standards;
- The exception to the low scores was again Middle Mill though the score of “8” was down from August and slightly below those recorded at this time in recent years;
- Of the species, there was a recovery in olive counts from August’s extremely low total for the 6 sites and a revival in cased caddis with quite high numbers for this time of year at most sites, almost all tiny in size. But the total number of individuals of all species recorded at our sites was even lower than in August. Although a crude measure it is a sign of the problems facing the Hogsmill this year: we need a lot more rain!