

## The Hogsmill in April 2021

Back to the extremes: warmth and blossom at the start of the month, then a sudden near 30° drop to a cold “blackthorn winter” that stopped the green shoots of spring in their tracks, before a gradual improvement.



The cold must have been a shock for critters along the Hogsmill, especially butterflies that were out in good numbers early on and then largely disappeared for a while before recovering slightly. But the lateness of new leaves made it easier to see our beautiful little birds displaying at the tops of riverside trees, though they needed to be careful as other less benevolent residents could see them too!



This newsletter looks at what is happening to the natural world along the Hogsmill, including the problems it faces and 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. This month we have been able to resume riverfly monitoring and further activities are planned for the next few weeks.

## The Hogsmill in April

Contrasts too along the Hogsmill: with little rain for well over 2 months, “green” growth in riverside meadows has been slow with “bare cracked” areas already widespread, though at least they seem to be good places to warm wings; while the crops in the fields alongside the Bonesgate do not look to be faring much better.

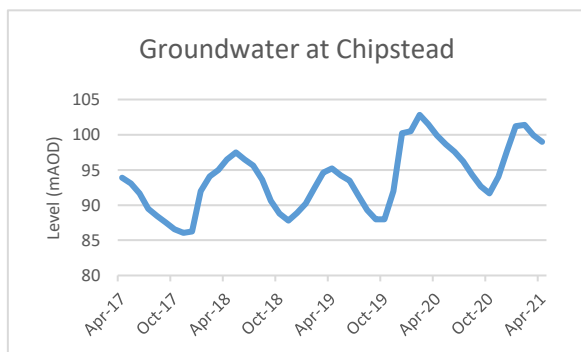


Long Meadow

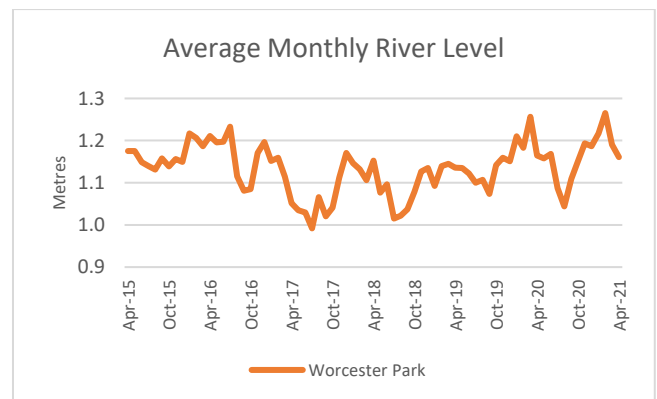
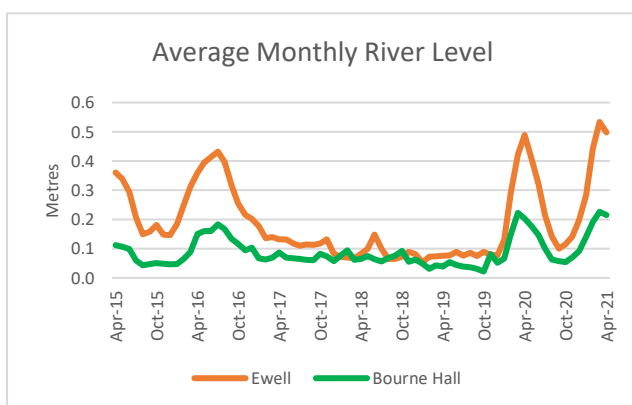


Park Farm

But so far the water in the main river has been sustained at a level and flow that are high by recent standards. Groundwater in the aquifer is falling but is still above normal so there’s a good flow through the springs; and the augmentation pipe in the Ewell mill pond has been switched on pumping more water into the river.



The impact is most obvious along the upper stretches of the river but even downstream where level and flow have begun to fall this month, they are still well above normal for dry weather conditions.







Ewell



Bonesgate confluence



Green Lane New Malden

But the dry weather has had a noticeable effect on the tributaries. The Bonesgate and Tolworth Brook have both been reduced to little more than a trickle in some stretches, though the Green Lanes Stream still has a reasonable flow, possibly because this *may* be partly spring-fed.



Bonesgate



Tolworth Brook



Green Lanes Stream

There have been a couple of new pollution “incidents” this month at outfalls with a history of problems, though they *look* relatively minor; and with further dry weather the “regression” in the appearance of several outfalls that have been subject to investigation/remediation has continued.



Cox Lane



Worcester Park Road



Malden Way South

If you see pollution along the river or indications of possible pollution, such as dying fish, please call the Environment Agency Hotline: 0800 80 70 60, and ideally take a photo.

## Hogsmill RMI In April

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.

We were able to survey all 7 of the Hogsmill sites this month: for Tolworth Brook the first time since last summer; and for the others the first since December. With plenty of water flowing through most sites and the sun shining, conditions were generally good for sampling, though the slower flow downstream made it a gentler pursuit there than upstream where the strong flow of unusually deep water was quite a challenge.

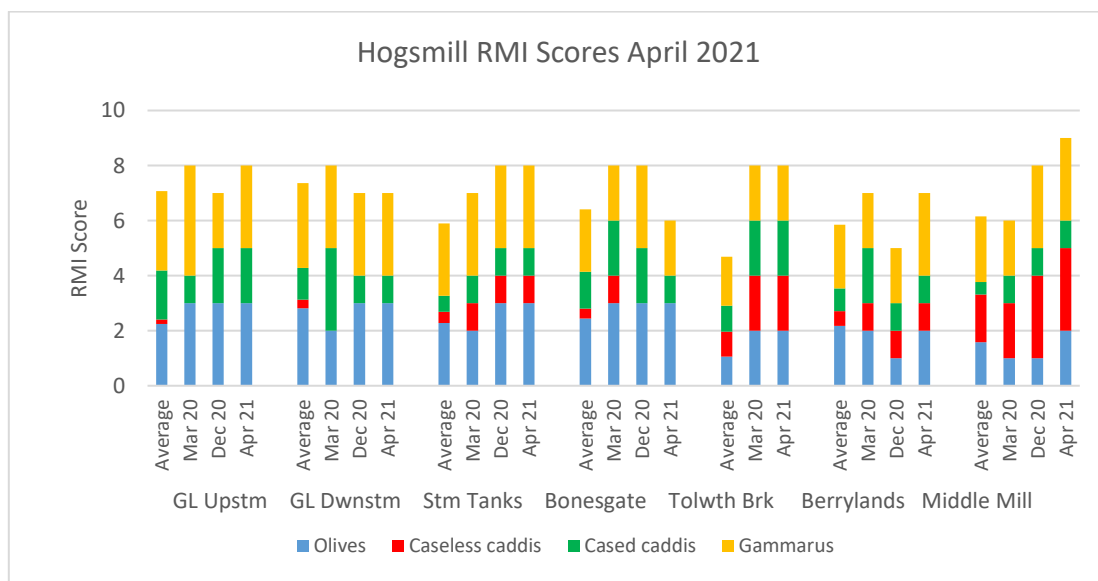


Berrylands



Green Lanes Stream

The average score across all sites was over 7½, which is good by historical standards, and scores and counts were mostly up from December, though after 3 months with conditions that should have been particularly suitable for invertebrates and are quite rare on the Hogsmill – stable steady flows of clear and deep water – the improvement was perhaps not as marked as might have been hoped for:





- The stand-out result was the score of “8” at Tolworth Brook, the one site with a low water level. This was based on good diversity with moderate counts of all 4 species rather than large numbers of a few that often drive a high score. A similar result was found last spring and while there is considerable variability in the scores here, the improvement from a “typical 4” 3 years ago suggests that the major restoration work undertaken then has had a substantial impact;
- The highest score - a “9” - was again at Middle Mill where the results have settled into a pattern of good scores based mainly on large counts of gammarus and caseless caddis. This emerged rapidly about 2 years ago after a long string of poor results, but it is not clear why;
- The lowest score - a “6” - was at Bonesgate where there was a large drop in gammarus numbers. There was a pollution incident just upstream earlier in the month, but it seems unlikely that this was severe enough to have had much impact. It is exactly 5 years this month that we started surveying this site and the counts then were very close to those found this time so perhaps it is a case of *plus ca change*;
- At the other sites the notable features were a return of the usual “spring boom” in cased caddis upstream at Green Lanes, something that was absent last year; and a recovery from the surprisingly low December score at Berrylands;
- As for the individual species, there was a very large increase in olive numbers this month to the highest overall total for over 2 years for the 6 main sites;
- After several months of surveys when almost all the cased caddis found were “hard-to-spot” tiny “sticks”, there was a welcome return of the larger more elaborate varieties this month, including some “whoppers”; and fish - including fry - were frequent catches in the nets, though the reaction of the critters to being caught seems to have been rather mixed!



“The indignity! Put in a tray again....



... even me an expectant Mum...



but being outside we can meet our friends.”

## Your Hogsmill needs you!

The easing of restrictions makes it possible to start tackling the backlog of work along the Hogsmill that has built up over the past year. SERT is putting together a programme of volunteer events, starting with:

- A litter pick to spruce up the Castle Hill Nature Reserve by the Bonesgate that is being held on April 30<sup>th</sup> from 10 to 12;
- It is hoped that the delayed follow-up Outfall Safari will go ahead in May, weather permitting. A training session is being held on April 28<sup>th</sup> from 6.30 to 8.30;
- Several balsam “bashing” events along the Hogsmill are planned for Invasive Species Week, May 22<sup>nd</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup>. More information will be available shortly.

Safety protocols will in place with smaller shorter events and booking will be essential. Details are on the events page of SERT’s website: <https://www.southeastrivertrust.org>



Rubbish “hotspot” at Castle Hill



Balsam by Long Meadow