

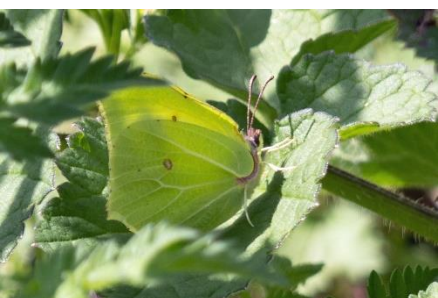
The Hogsmill in April 2022

A mix of conditions along the Hogsmill this month: the highest and lowest temperatures of the year; strong winds from all directions; and an intense April shower! So it's been a stuttering start to the season for wildlife. Some "early birds" are thriving, while others seem slow to emerge; the cold blasts have made life hard for our "slithering" residents; though spells of southerly winds have helped more migrants to return.



(Photo thanks to Robb)

It's also been challenging for butterflies, especially as food looks to have been scarce in the dry weather; some have made the most of the sun, while others have skulked in the undergrowth to avoid the winds.



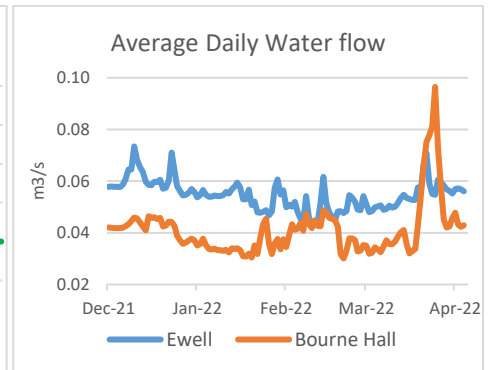
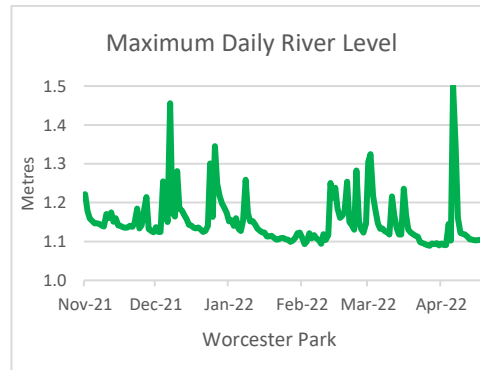
This newsletter looks at what is happening to the natural world along the Hogsmill, including the problems it faces and volunteer activities to monitor and restore its habitat, working with the South East Rivers Trust (SERT) and other local groups and alongside the Environment Agency (EA) and local water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

The Hogsmill in April

It's been another unusually dry month with rain concentrated in a "day of downpours" that led to the first large surge down the Hogsmill this year, partly filling the Ewell Storm Tanks but also flushing away many patches of scum and debris. This quickly dissipated and perhaps surprisingly there hasn't been much change in the river level over the course of the month; and the flow at Ewell has actually increased slightly.



(Photo thanks to Sean)



Both the good and bad sides of the Hogsmill have been on display this month. The water has been unusually clear and with new bright green growth along the banks, in places it has looked like a rural idyll that even Ophelia might enjoy! But large patches of "slimy green" algae have appeared, especially on the Ewell Mill Pond; there are stretches of bare and crumbling banks, including by the "unsightly" new flats close to the river in Ewell; and areas of scum and rubbish are reforming as the dry weather continues.



It has also been a mixed picture beside the river. The burst of fresh growth has highlighted the magnificence of many trees in the Hogsmill greenspace and the succour they provide to insects, but it has also shown up the damage that disease is inflicting on many other trees. On the ground, the bluebells are blooming and it seems a good year for dandelions, but the meadows are unseasonably dry and cracked.



Volunteer activities this month included a Field Recording Day examining insects, worms and river invertebrates in the Rose Walk and Elmbridge Meadows greenspaces; and sessions tidying up the river and landscape in the Hogsmill STW site in preparation for the re-introduction of water voles in the summer.



A key part of the latter was pulling Himalayan balsam that is already carpeting the banks. Further “bashing” events are planned: Kingston University is organising sessions at Middle Mill on May 11th and at Elmbridge Meadows on May 28th; for further details and to book contact: biodiversity@kingston.ac.uk. The “Moles” are running bashes along the Bonesgate on June 7-9th; for details contact: mole.project@surreycc.gov.uk or 1372743783. The aim this year is to put particular effort into tackling balsam in upstream areas like the Bonesgate. SERT is also planning sessions here; precise locations will be determined once “hotspots” have been identified. Details will be on: <https://www.southeastrivertrust.org/events>

As for pollution, the California Road outfall, which was given the “worst” pollution score in both Outfall Safaris, was still horrible this month, with rag caught on the banks and the stream to the main river covered in fat. Thames Water’s (TW) investigation has found 3 linked misconnections and a blockage so hopefully this will be improving soon.

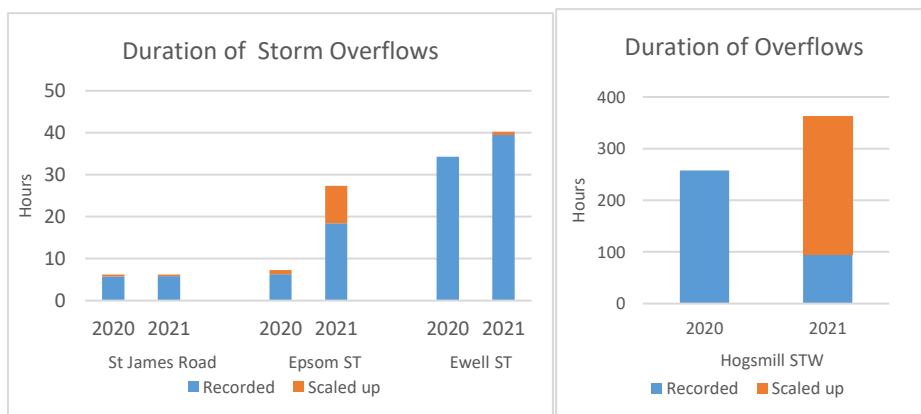
Combined Sewer Overflows (CSO’s) discharge sewage into rivers when the system exceeds capacity. EA has published data on 2021 spills, including at the 4 Hogsmill CSOs. Unfortunately monitors only operated part of the time and much less than in 2020. But even so *recorded* durations of spills at the Epsom and Ewell Storm Tanks were higher than in 2020. The monitor at the Hogsmill STW, which has by far the longest spills on the Hogsmill, was only operating for a quarter of the time in 2021. But simply scaling up the recorded figures by the extent of the under-monitoring – a crude assumption – suggests spills here also rose in 2021.

Overall for the Hogsmill as a whole, scaling-up suggests total spills of over 400 hours in 2021, over a third higher than in 2020. By comparison and on the same basis, discharges to the Beverley Brook were for just under 400 hours in 2021; and those to the Wandle and Mole were much higher at around 1400 and 6000(!) hours, though these are both much larger rivers.

The Government is currently consulting on its ‘Storm Overflow Discharge Reduction Plan’. You can comment at: <https://consult.defra.gov.uk/water-industry/storm-overflow-discharge-reduction-plan/> up to May 12th.



California Road

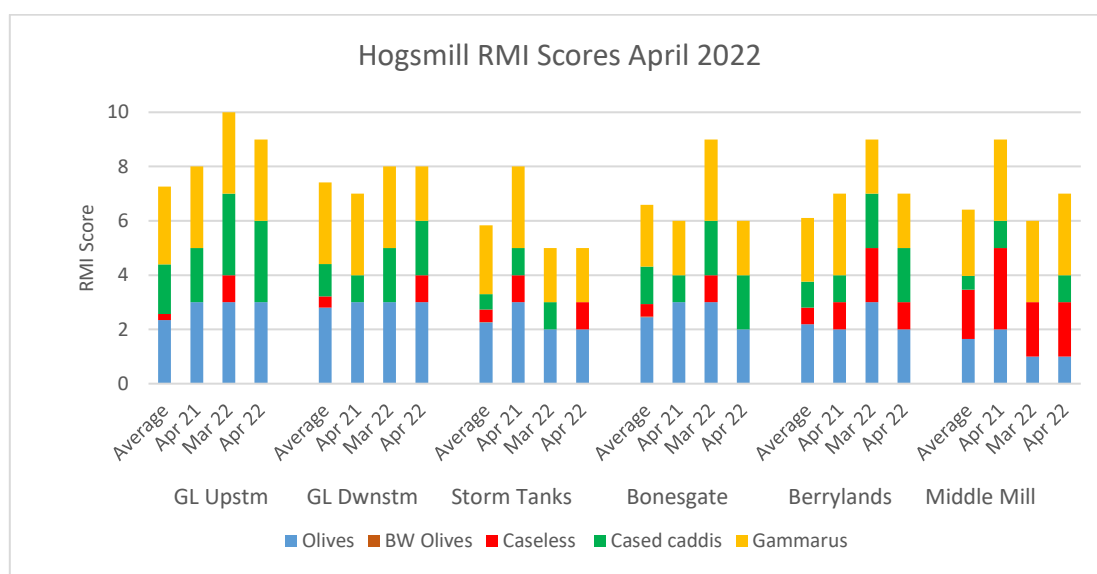


If you see pollution in the river or indications of possible pollution, such as dying fish, please call the EA Hotline: 0800 80 70 60, and ideally take a photo. You can also contact Thames Water on: 0800 316 9800 (option 2); on: www.thameswater.co.uk/help/emergencies/pollution; or on twitter: [@thameswater](https://twitter.com/thameswater).

Hogsmill RMI In 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.

The 6 main Hogsmill sites were sampled between April 13th and 16th. The results were disappointing: many counts and scores were down, with the overall average score almost 1 point below March and the lowest since last summer. There was no obvious reason, as water conditions appeared reasonable. It looks like a “reversion to the norm” as scores at most sites were close to the long-term average, with the falls concentrated in ones that have had unusually high scores in recent months:



- the highest score this month was again upstream at Green Lanes, boosted by the usual spring jump in cased caddis numbers - over 100 were counted;
- scores at both Bonesgate and Berrylands were down quite sharply, by “3” and “2” points. But these falls rather overstated the extent of the changes, which mainly reflected moderate reductions in counts that were often around the “band boundaries”. Numbers of cased caddis rose at both sites;
- results at the other 3 sites were little changed from March;
- counts of olives, gammarus and caseless caddis were down quite markedly overall and at most sites. But again it was a good month for cased caddis with some impressive-looking specimens;
- Also particularly numerous this month were demoiselle nymphs so hopefully we are in for a good season of bright blue adults along the river. But of concern is that a small crayfish was found at the Bonesgate site, the second time that what is probably the damaging signal variety has been spotted along this stretch of river.



Next month the RMI surveys will be combined with the first volunteer surveys on the Hogsmill as part of the SMART Rivers project. As well as the usual bankside counts, the samples will be preserved for more detailed analysis of species under a microscope to enable a wider range of more sophisticated measures of water quality to be constructed. The “lab” analysis will be at Bourne Hall in Ewell on May 20th. Any of the regular RMI volunteers who are not part of the SMART “team” would be welcome to help with this analysis : please contact Jess for details: jess@southeastriverstrust.org.