

The Hogsmill in December 2021

It's been more like a typical winter this month, with plenty of raw, damp dreariness. Birds along the Hogsmill corridor have reacted in different ways. Some have stepped up their hunting activities: the fishing exploits of the "queenfisher" in the Ewell ponds have brought many with their cameras to the banks.



Others have peered down in envy from the tree-tops or just hunkered down looking miserable.



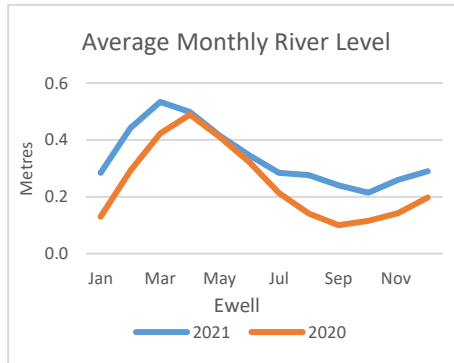
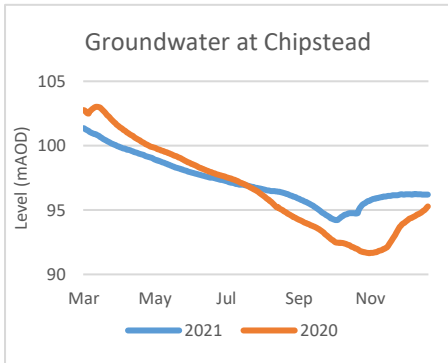
While others have flitted around the trees loudly proclaiming their territories or feeding up for scarcer times; or just congregated in menacing groups in the gloom, perhaps hoping for a re-make of "The Birds".



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, especially Thames Water (TW).

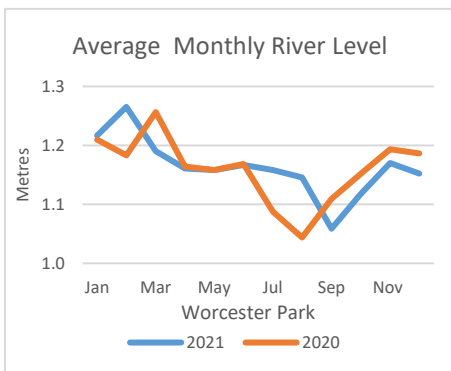
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Apart from a short spell at the start of the month, there's been little rain since late October. This has stalled the winter build-up in the aquifer but so far has had little impact on the river. Even though augmentation stopped in October, continuing strong flows from the springs mean the water level upstream has again risen.



Lower Mill "Falls"

Storm Barra produced a new case of "Browngate" as run-off from farmland in Malden Rushett sent a tide of brown water down the Bonesgate. But this dispersed quickly and although the water level has fallen slightly downstream in the main Hogsmill, for much of the month there has been a steady and stable flow.



Bonesgate confluence



Elmbridge Meadows

As well as this "natural" pollution along the Bonesgate, the dry weather later in the month led to a sudden spate of "brown flows" from several outfalls, mostly well-known polluters, but also from another of the outfalls beside the A3 that had previously been notable mainly for its "black" road run-off after rain.



Rushett Crossroads



A240 downstream



King Charles Road



Malden Way North

Some new members have joined the “Pollution Patrol” team this month and they have already been busy inspecting closely the renewed pollution spills at Sheephouse Way!

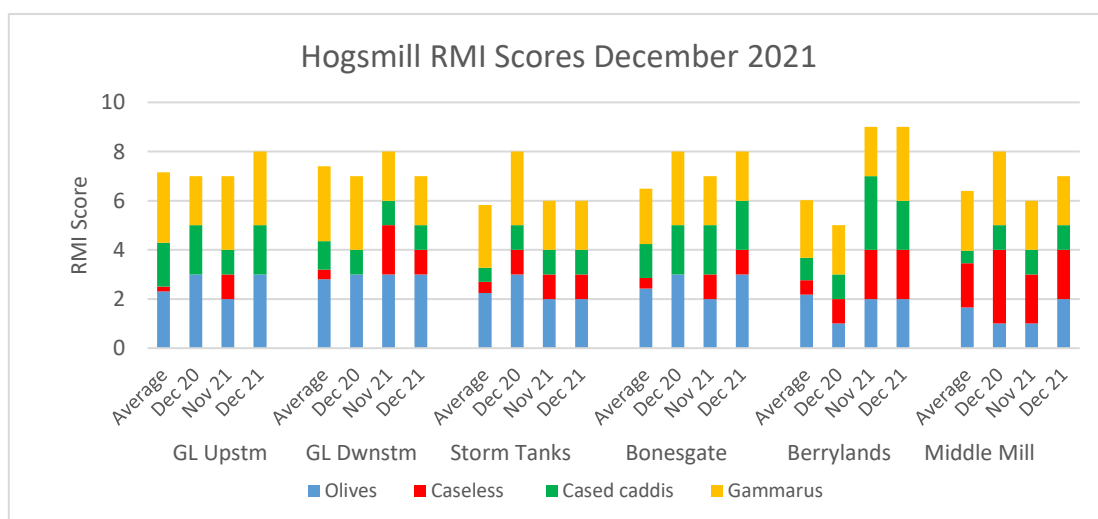


If you see pollution along the river or indications of possible pollution, such as dying fish, please call the EA Hotline: 0800 80 70 60, and ideally take a photo. You can also contact Thames Water on: 0800 316 9800 (option 2) or on their website: www.thameswater.co.uk/help/emergencies/pollution. They have launched a fast track system so that once reported a rapid response team should be at the scene within 2 hours.

Hogsmill RMI In December

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 December 14th and 22nd. The counts were mostly fairly similar to last month, but the scores were slightly higher overall and again good by historical standards:



- Like last month the best result was a “9” at Berrylands, again driven by unusually high numbers of cased and caseless caddis with at least 2 different species of both being found and despite a low water temperature that tends to make them less active and harder to spot;

- Also notable was the “8” at Bonesgate, partly driven by a record count of 50 cased caddis;
- The score at Middle Mill was, like last month, much lower than the rest of the year, but December has almost invariably been a low scoring month here so this is probably a seasonal effect;
- The one score below the historical average for the site was the “7” downstream at Green Lanes, but apart from a low gammarus count, numbers were similar to the norm for this time of year;
- The species highlights were again caddis. Unusually, more than 10 cased caddis were found at 3 sites; mostly “tiny sticks” – probably *limnephilus* – but also some large “leaf-covered” – probably *glyphotaelius pellucidus*. Caseless cadis were found at 5 sites ranging in shapes and sizes – probably *rhyacophila* and one or more type of *hydropsyche*.



“5p for a tiny stick”



“I’m really only a dead leaf”



Caseless “scrum”

Catchment Partnership

The Catchment Partnership brings together organisations with an interest in the Hogsmill – SERT, EA, Water Companies, local councils, volunteer groups, etc – with the aim of co-ordinating work to improve the health of the river and its catchment for wildlife and local people.

Its annual round-up meeting was held this month. Some points of interest from the group updates:

- SERT has received £350,000 from Thames Water as a Voluntary Reparation for the environmental damage to the Hogsmill from the pollution spill in Green Lane Rec in 2016. They plan to use this to re-naturalise the Hogsmill greenspace through Elmbridge Meadows in a project that will involve extensive community engagement, volunteering and outdoor education;
- SERT is developing a more strategic and co-ordinated approach to reducing the spread and abundance of Himalayan Balsam in the Hogsmill catchment. This will include: focusing initially on upstream stretches, especially the Bonesgate; trialling a number of different approaches, such as rust fungus if feasible, plug planting and scything; and more real-time communication between groups;

- Kingston Council is looking at Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDs) as a way to reduce road run-off flowing directly into local rivers. A pilot scheme being developed with SERT will involve the construction of a wetland in Alexandra Park to help mitigate the large flows into the Tolworth Brook;
- TW's programme of detailed investigations into polluted outfalls (SWOP) has so far identified over 400 incorrectly plumbed domestic appliances that were allowing untreated wastewater to flow into the Hogsmill. SWOP investigations into 10 Hogsmill outfalls are ongoing, and more are planned;
- With more heavy rain "events" this year, the Epsom and Ewell Storm Tanks have overflowed for longer: in the first 9-10 months for about 50 hours compared to 40 hours in the whole of 2020.