

The Hogsmill in February 2021

Conditions along the Hogsmill have swung wildly over the last month: more soggy gloom; then icy blasts; and finishing with springlike sun and warmth. It must have been confusing for the critters, some of whom didn't seem to want to face the world while other rare visitors were seen checking out the river.



"Is it something I said?"



"Wake me up when it's spring!"



"Any tasty fish in the Hogsmill?"
(Photo thanks to Jenny)



"Some nice carp by the Bonesgate"

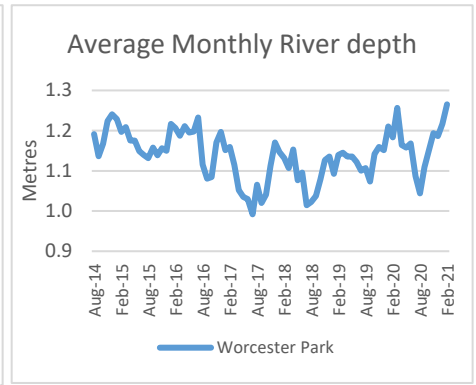
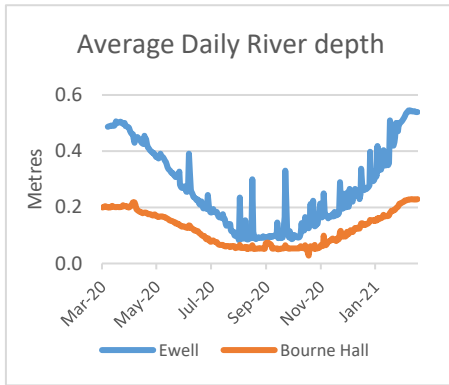
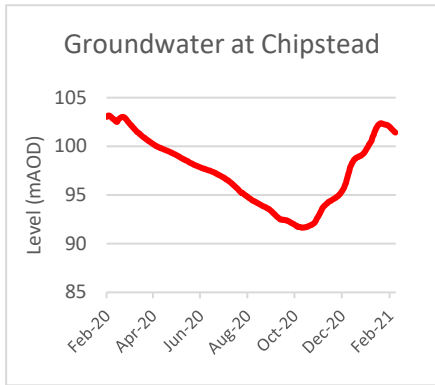


"In your dreams!"

This newsletter looks at what is happening to the natural world along the Hogsmill corridor, including the problems it faces and activities to monitor and to restore its habitat that hopefully will resume soon.

The Hogsmill in February

More heavy rain around the start of the month led to further increases in the level and flow of water down the Hogsmill, though with a drier period since they have levelled off. The situation upstream has closely mirrored last year: groundwater in the aquifer peaked at close to the February 2020 value while water levels at the Ewell gauging stations have now just surpassed last year's high, again with very strong flows. With plenty of water still flowing down the tributaries throughout the month, the average water level along the middle stretches in February was the highest for at least 6 years.



Lower Mill "falls"



Green Lane Stream



Horton Stream



Ewell Court Stream



Bonesgate



Tolworth Brook

After the downpours early in the month, the river again turned bright brown, but with the relatively dry conditions thereafter its appearance steadily improved and by the end of the month it was looking much more like a "real" chalk stream with a good flow of (unusually) clear water along much of its length.



Long Meadow – early Feb



Bonesgate confluence - mid Feb



Stepping stones - mid Feb



Watersedge – end Feb



Sheephouse Way – end Feb



A3 Rock Ramp – end Feb

There do not appear to have been any new pollution incidents this month; and initially there weren't many indications of pollution at most of the "usual suspect" outfalls, albeit with some exceptions such as Middle Mill and a few others. But this may partly reflect the masking effect of so much winter rain and surface water flowing through them, as with the drier weather more signs of pollution emerged later in the month.



Alexandria Park



A240 upstream



Sheephouse Way

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.

Another sort of "pollution" that has been very evident this month is litter along the river. This is always more obvious at this time of year with less vegetation on the banks but seems worse this year, probably the result of more people being around, less organised litter-picking and storm surges that have deposited large amounts of rubbish in overhanging vegetation. The extra footfall and wet weather have also left a legacy of mud "fields" and trodden ground that seem likely to scar the landscape for some time.



A3 bridge



"Ophelia would not be amused!"



Long Meadow

Changing of the seasons along the Hogsmill

The transformation from winter to spring that normally happens smoothly and rapidly about now has been disrupted this year by the extreme weather swings, but nature has shown its customary resilience with signs of spring appearing later in the month.

The riverside meadows went from early floods to ice sheets but were returning to near normal by the end of the month by which time crops looked to be growing well in the fields by the Bonesgate.



Six Acre "lake"



Elmbridge "ice field"



Park Farm

The icy blast brought a temporary halt to the emergence of green shoots along the river corridor. But this enabled us to appreciate for longer the amazing sculpture and colours of the "naked" trees by the riverside.



Long Meadow "wood"



Upper Mill "wood"



Elmbridge Meadows



Watersedge



Six Acre Meadow

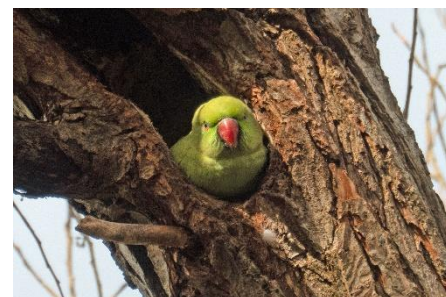


Hogsmill Nature Trail

As soon as there was some sun and warmth, the already-abundant catkins were joined by flowers and “bursting” buds, appearing as if by magic overnight bringing new colour to the trees and bushes.



Our feather friends along the Hogsmill were also quick to resume their preparations for spring: pairing up, building their nests and being ready to protect them from potential interlopers.



Hopefully we’ll be restarting monitoring and restoration work soon. But in the meantime if you’d like a refresher or to learn about monitoring, a recording of a talk to the London Natural History Society on ‘Riverfly Monitoring in Greater London’ by Joe Pecorelli is now on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/PP4NM-yAf1c> . The London Freshwater Group is also holding its spring meeting on Zoom at 1.30 on 19th March and this includes another talk by Joe this time on ‘What is next for River Based Citizen Science in London?’. If you’re not a member but would like details of the meeting contact: eleri.pritchard.15@ucl.ac.uk