

The Hogsmill in June 2021

A month of contrasts along the Hogsmill with heat, humidity and downpours! Our local fishers had to cope with a river that nearly disappeared under massive bankside growth then changed to near-flood conditions.



Contrasts too for the critters: a Hogsmill record for water invertebrates at one site in our surveys this month but disappointing results at others. Above the ground, it was a good month for “damsels and dragons” and some birds, sadly now quite rare along the Hogsmill, were displaying prominently. But until late on there still weren’t many butterflies, and those that were out seemed intent on hiding their more colourful sides.



Meadow brown



Comma

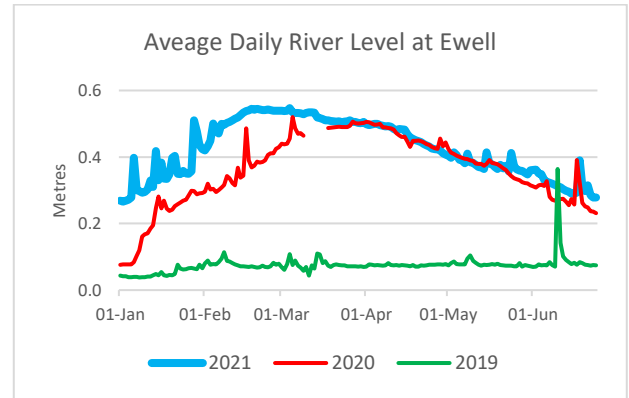
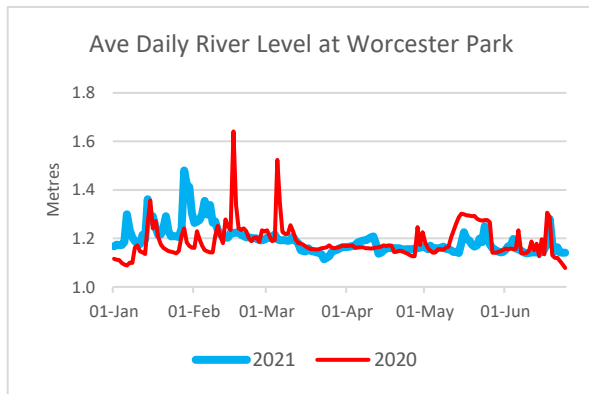


Small tortoiseshell

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.

The Hogsmill in June

Another big turnaround in river conditions this month. With the early dry spell, the water level and flow began to drop, though they were still close to last year's values and high by historical standards, especially upstream in Ewell, perhaps the result of continued use of the supplementary top-up in the mill pond.



Then what had been a long period of slowly-changing and tranquil conditions came to an abrupt end with the mid-month downpours that sent a large water “surge” down the river, though this dispersed quickly.



10 June

Green Lane Bridge, New Malden



19 Jun

The fluctuating weather conditions led to some large and rapid changes along the banks and meadows beside the Hogsmill. In a disappointing year so far for wildflowers, there was a brief burst of late-spring colour early in the month, but that was soon replaced by particularly strong growth in grasses in the meadows and then, with the humidity and rain, another spell of vigorous growth in bankside vegetation.



Tolworth Court Farm



Long Meadow



Hogsmill STW

All this led to meadows looking very different at the summer solstice from recent years. In June 2019 Long Meadow was full of flowers and insects; last year it was dry and bare providing little support for any insects around; and this year it was dominated by slightly tired-looking grass with limited signs of insect life.



June 2019



June 2020



June 2021

Our volunteers were again busy this month. As well as tidying up at some of our local Nature Reserves, the dry spell at last enabled progress to be made with the Outfall Safari before the weather intervened again.



Hogsmill STW Nature Reserve



Edith Gardens Nature Reserve
(Photo thanks to Ben)



Tolworth Brook

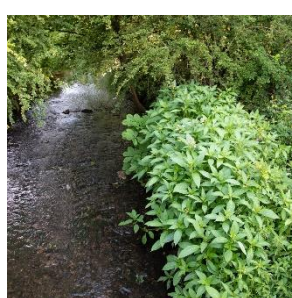
Several groups did excellent work “bashing” balsam, including Old Malden Cubs in Six Acre Meadow and a team tackling a “hidden” stretch of the Tolworth Brook. But it is an uphill battle as weather conditions have fostered very rapid growth in this invasive plant, some of which is already in flower. Perhaps we need to adopt more widely the “pull and plant” approach Kristine has taken in the STW, a hotspot for balsam, by planting other species along the cleared banks that hopefully will crowd out further balsam growth.



Six Acre Meadow



Tolworth Brook



Sheephouse Way



Hogsmill STW

As for pollution, after one of the downpours the Ewell Storm Tanks were seen overflowing and the river turned “black” by outfalls carrying run-off from major roads. At several outfalls there have been short bursts of what looked like waste from misconnected washing machines; at one by the Berrylands RMI site these have appeared on 3 out of the last 4 times we’ve been sampling so there must be a lot of washing going on! Early surveys for the Safari have found signs of pollution at some outfalls not on the usual “watch” list, but we won’t have a full picture until the weather relents and all stretches can be completed.



A3 Malden Way



Green Lane Bridge New Malden



Elmbridge Meadows

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.

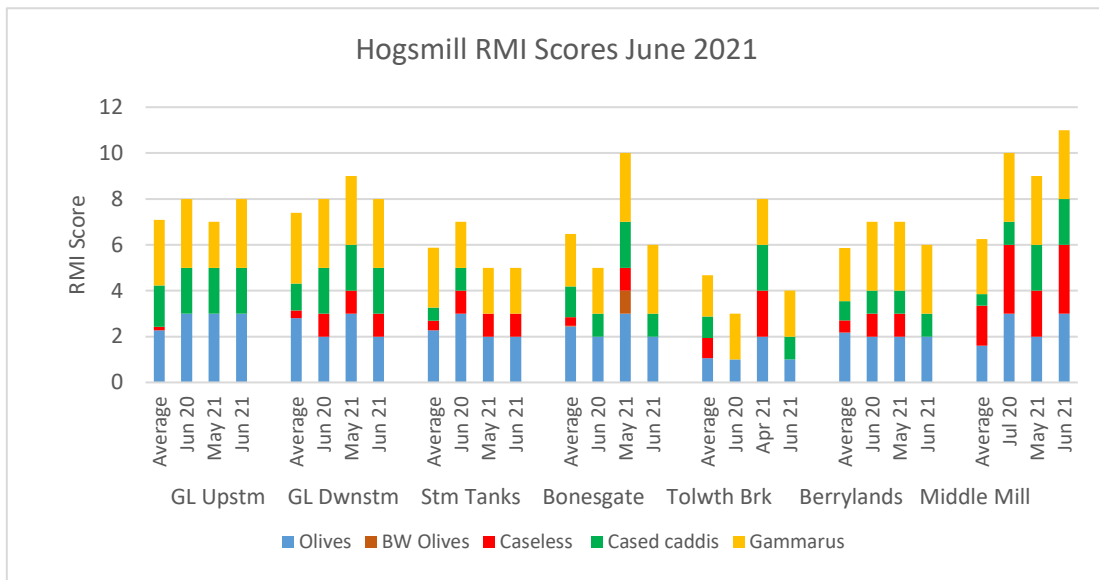
Hogsmill RMI In June

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.

All 7 Hogsmill sites were surveyed between 10th and 22nd June, a longer “spread” than normal and in differing river conditions with some before and some after the wet spell. The *overall* average score was down, but more notable and puzzling is that there were large changes in scores in both directions at some sites that were not obviously related to these differences in conditions:

- At Middle Mill a score of “11” was recorded, the highest anywhere on the Hogsmill in the 475 samples taken since 2014, with counts of over 100 for olives, gammarus and caseless caddis. This was not entirely unexpected as scores have usually peaked in the summer here and very high counts of individual species have sometimes been recorded. But it is a mystery why this site now appears better performing than other sites and is itself doing much better than 3-4 years ago. We are hoping that samples recently taken nearby by EA for lab analysis will throw light on this;

- At Bonesgate the score fell from May’s record “10” to a “6”. Both samples were taken in similar river conditions and after heavy rain and there were no signs of pollution so another puzzle, though this month’s score is in line with past June scores so the outlier looks to be more the May “boom”;
- Also a big drop at Tolworth Brook to “4” from “8” when we last surveyed in April. This month’s sample was taken during the dry spell and the water level was low, which could be a reason. But again this month’s score was in line with past Junes so the anomaly looks to be more the “8”;
- At the other 4 sites, 2 of which were sampled before the rain and 2 after, the scores were broadly similar to those for May and in line with previous years;



- As for individual species, gammarus counts were unusually high at most sites this month and we caught a large number of bullheads, many this year’s “brood”, plus some “fierce-looking creatures”.



Demoiselle nymph



Water scorpions