

The Hogsmill in May 2021

We've had much more typical English conditions this month, with plenty of rain that at least has the benefit of fostering a late explosion of spring growth and vibrant colours along the banks of the Hogsmill river.



Breeding season is well under way and while the attrition rate amongst chicks seems to have been high this year, many have made good progress on the road from eggs through "fluffy cuteness" to "gawky teenagers".



It's been another difficult month for insects, especially butterflies though damselflies have been prominent by the river. But critters below the water have fared better: high numbers of water invertebrates were found in our surveys this month, including a pollution-sensitive species that is quite rare in urban rivers. With eel monitoring re-starting, the first of this year's "slippery migrants" have been recorded at Middle Mill.



Beautiful demoiselle



Blue-winged olive (photo thanks to Kim)

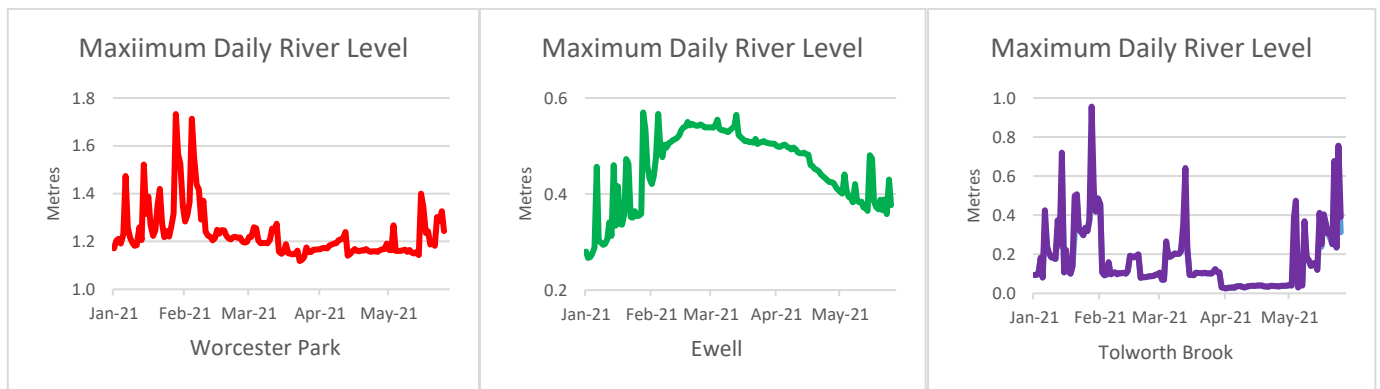


(photo thanks to Nick)

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 May

A major turnaround in conditions: from near-drought in recent months to double the average rainfall for May. With less water flowing through the springs as groundwater in the aquifer has fallen, this has provided a timely boost to water volumes in the Hogsmill. There were good depths and flows at all our sampling sites, ones very close to those seen this time last year despite different weather patterns.



While there have been some water “surges”, especially down the tributaries, most of the rain has been spread out so there’s been less turbulence than with the winter rains, though with more surface water fuelling the river, the clear water seen recently has been replaced by something more muddy. But a benefit of the rain is that the meadows and woods are at last looking springlike, hopefully giving more support to wildlife.



Shephouse Way



Green Lane New Malden



Long Meadow



Six Acre Wood

The one pollution incident we're aware of this month is what looked like an oil spill along the Green Lanes Stream. The amount of rain has made it impossible to check for "conventional" sewage pollution at outfalls – and the systematic Outfall Safari scheduled for this month has had to be postponed until June – but the large amount of road run-off that has flowed through outfalls seems bound to have contained pollutants.



Green Lane Stream confluence



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. Pollution can have significant consequences for polluters. Thames Water has just been fined £4m for a spill of about 79m litres of raw sewage in Green Lane Rec in 2016, a substantial amount of which ended up in the Hogsmill.

Hogsmill RMI In May

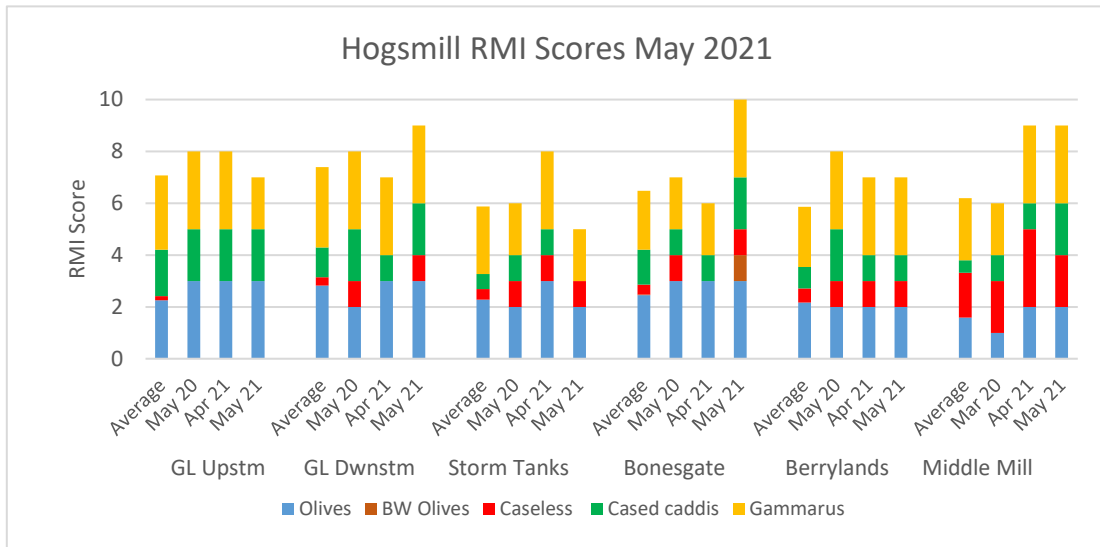
The River Monitoring Initiative (RMI) is a national scheme for monitoring river health that uses "scores" based on counts of certain "water quality sensitive" invertebrates in net samples to assess water quality.

Our 6 main-river sites were surveyed between 12th and 17th May. The results were generally good with an overall average score slightly up on April and one of the highest over the past 5 years. Particularly notable was the variety of species: 4 different ones were found at 3 sites and at Bonesgate we found 5 including blue-winged olives. This is only the second time in over 450 samples that a blue-winged has been recorded, though as they are hard to distinguish from "ordinary" olives, others have probably been missed:

- The highlight was the record score of "10" at Bonesgate. As well as the blue winged olive, counts of cased and caseless caddis were the highest we've ever found here. What lay behind the massive improvement from April's poor result is a mystery. River conditions seemed similar at the time, though a water surge after rain the previous evening *could* have flushed critters from the riverbed;
- At the other extreme, there was a sharp drop in score to "5" at Ewell Storm Tanks, though this partly reflected "spikes" in the scoring system as the fall in counts was much less marked. Again

this is a mystery. There was a good flow of water through the site and it was sampled before any heavy downpours that might have led to the tanks overflowing;

- There were some changes in both directions in scores at the other 4 sites, most notably a 2-point improvement downstream at Green Lanes, but the underlying counts were mostly similar to April;



- As for the individual species, counts of cased caddis were well above average at several sites this month, though this may be partly seasonal, and there was a wide variety of types, from the large to the tiny, and even one that seemed to have mislaid its case!



“Big Friendly Giant”

“Cone”

“Double stick”

“Small shell”

“Bareback”

Spring-cleaning along the Hogsmill

The easing of restrictions has enabled restoration work to restart along the Hogsmill and for volunteers to resume tidying up. EA’s spring improvement programme this year included clearing out a stagnant and overgrown stretch of river around Watersedge “island” producing a much more vibrant channel. Construction of a replacement for the crumbling boardwalk by Six Acre Meadow is also progressing well .



Watersedge "island"



"Out with the old"



Six Acre Meadow

"In with the new"

(Re)constructions that are progressing fast, but are perhaps less welcome, are developments on the old mill sites in Ewell and Worcester Park. We need extra housing, but building right up to the river seems a shame.



Riverside Mill Worcester Park



Lower Mill Ewell

It's been great to see our wonderful volunteers working hard removing litter, pulling out balsam and also re-planting along the rivebank, something primarily designed to facilitate the re-introduction of water voles next year but also potentially of wider benefit in reducing erosion and suppressing balsam.



Castle Hill litter
(photos thanks to Emma)



Six Acre Meadow balsam



Green Lane Rec re-planting
(photos thanks to Nick)

