

## The Hogsmill in October 2021

There's been a gradual transition to autumn this month as the unusual warmth has delayed the onset of nature's seasonal shutdown. But the foliage is now turning and although the Hogsmill corridor is not renowned for its autumn show, this year there are some wonderful colours, especially by the upstream lakes.



Bourne Hall Lake

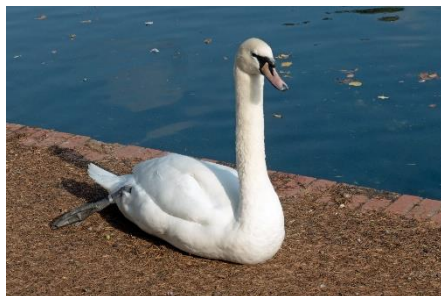


Ewell Court Lake



Stew Ponds

Summer wildlife has now largely disappeared so there are no longer any large "cabbage" whites to spot over the meadows, but there are still plenty of other "large whites" to see on and around the river.



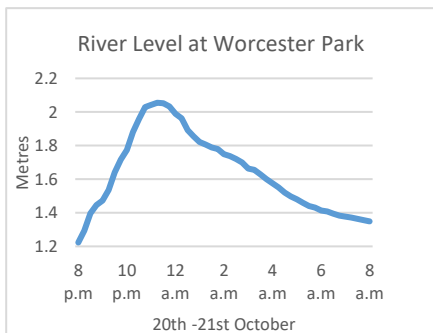
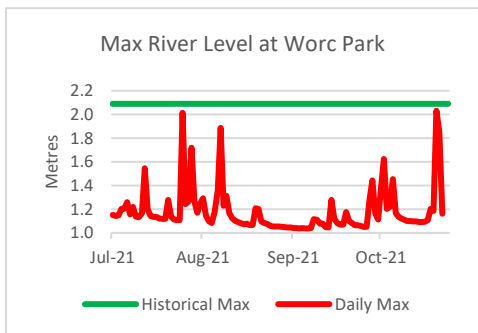
This newsletter looks at what is happening to the natural world along the Hogsmill, including the problems it faces and volunteer activities to monitor and restore its habitat, working with the South East Rivers Trust (SERT) and other local groups and alongside the Environment Agency (EA) and local water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

This month we passed a total of 500 riverfly surveys since our regular water quality monitoring began on the Hogsmill in 2014; and the second Hogsmill Outfall Safari surveying pollution along the river was completed.

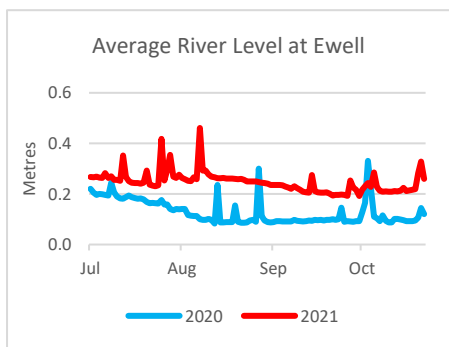
### The Hogsmill in October

The Hogsmill has had another battering from the elements: the average rainfall for a whole month fell in a short spell at the start and there was another massive downpour in mid-month. The latter pushed the water level at EA's Worcester Park gauging station close to its highest value in 10 years of recording, the second

time this has happened in 3 months. It also highlighted the “flashiness” of the Hogsmill: water rising from mid-evening on the 20<sup>th</sup>, peaking at midnight – so no photo! – and being well down again by morning; and it left behind a trail of destruction and strong currents that even washed away one of the mink rafts!



The cumulative effect of rain over the summer, which has resulted in water in the aquifer starting its winter rise very early, means that even in the dry interludes this month, there has been more water flowing down the Hogsmill than is usual for this time of year, especially in the upper stretches.



Green Lanes confluence



Old Malden

Our excellent volunteers have again been busy this month tidying up along the river corridor before winter; including a litter pick along the Green Lanes Stream; bramble “bashing” at the Hogsmill STW Nature Reserve; maintenance at the Edith Gardens Reserve; and scrub clearance by the “Moles” in Six Acre Meadow.



Green Lanes Stream  
(Photo thanks to SERT)



Hogsmill STW Nature Reserve



Edith Gardens Reserve



Six Acre Meadow

As for pollution, it looks as if the downpours this month led to the Storm Tanks overflowing again; after one storm the Ewell screens appeared damaged so hopefully effectiveness was not reduced. The storm surges not only shifted large amounts of litter down river, but also led to some unsightly scum on the Tolworth Brook; and there were still outfalls showing clear signs of pollution despite the volume of surface water.



Ewell Storm Tanks  
(Photo thanks to Robb)



Tolworth Brook



A240 Bridge

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.

## Hogsmill RMI In October

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.

7 Hogsmill sites were sampled between October 13<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>, and it was great to welcome back Phil at Berrylands to take the prize for performing the 500<sup>th</sup> survey on the Hogsmill! All sites were sampled in the calm between the big storms, with moderate water levels and steady flows.

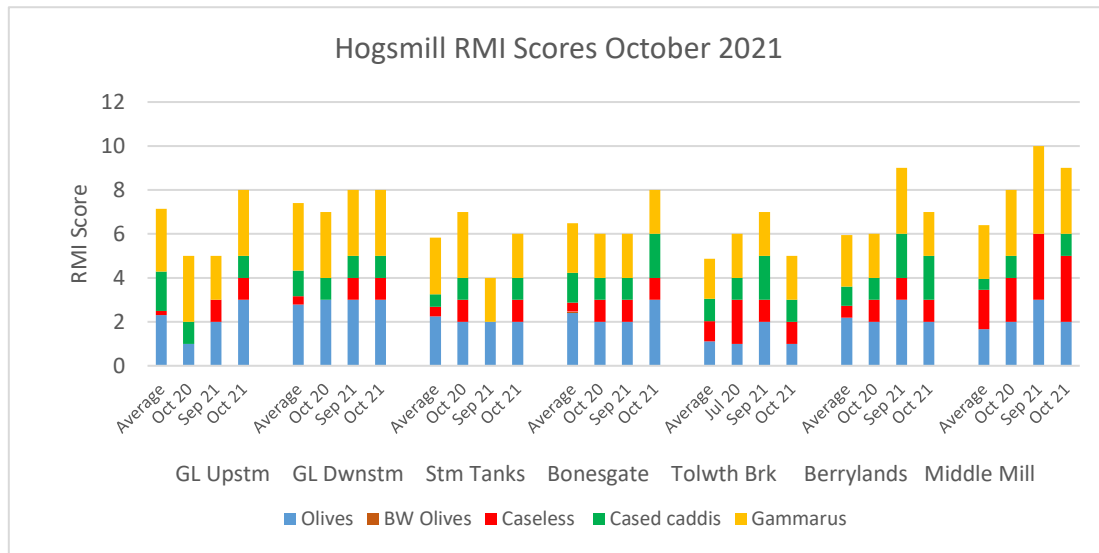


“500 and counting...”



“... but 500 times we’ve been dumped in trays!”

The results were quite good, with scores at all sites at or above the long-term average and a “full-house” of all 4 of the “usual” species found at all sites – a first. Scores were also much more even along the river:



- There were noticeable improvements at the downstream sites: with one small exception, counts of all 4 species were higher than in September at all the sites, which translated into increases in score of 2 or more “points” upstream at Green Lanes, at the Storm Tanks and Bonesgate. So whatever led to some unusually poor scores in recent months seems to have passed;
- By contrast scores at the 3 downstream sites were all down, with some large falls in some species counts, especially olives. But these falls were from unusually high scores in September down to ones more typical for these sites. There is no obvious reason for the decline, though there were signs at Tolworth Brook that the early month storms had had a “scouring effect” altering the shape of the river bed, which could have affected the counts;
- Amongst the species, large numbers of tiny “baby” cased caddis were again found at some sites, notably Bonesgate and Berrylands where we rarely find more than a handful of large “adults” at other times. By contrast, upstream at Green Lanes where we find high numbers of large caddis in the spring, hardly any tiny ones were recorded, albeit in trays full of weed.

## Outfall Safari

Misconnected pipes in properties and sewer cross-connections that result in sewage being discharged directly to the river through outfalls is a major cause of poor water quality in the Hogsmill. To obtain a snapshot of the overall scale of the problem, in autumn 2016 the Zoological Society of London organised a comprehensive survey – an **Outfall Safari** – in which volunteers calculated a pollution “score” for each outfall from its appearance in dry weather. This identified 280 separate outfalls on the main river and its tributaries, a quarter of which showed some signs of pollution and over 30 appeared moderately or severely polluted.

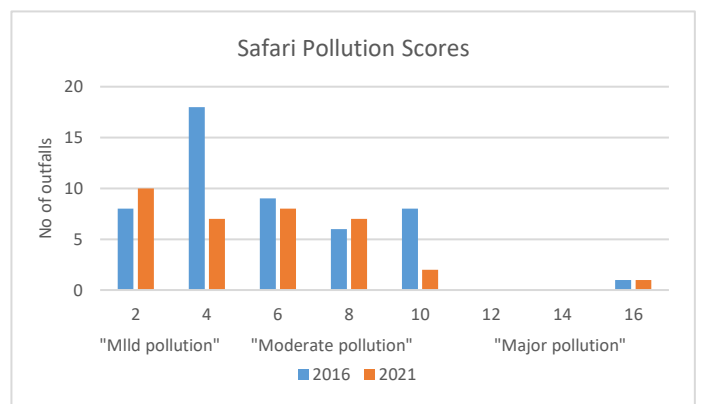
The “worst cases” were added to Thames Water’s (TW) list of outfalls for investigation and over the ensuing 5 years a large amount of work has been done, particularly by the Environment Protection team, to identify and rectify the problems. This work is being further expanded in TW’s current 5-year Plan in which resources for such work, especially the more detailed (SWOP) investigations, have been greatly increased

A repeat Safari, organised by SERT, was undertaken this summer. Despite bad weather and extensive bank vegetation, the hardy teams of “surveyors” assessed about 240 outfalls, many in “hard-to-access” areas, with 190 of the 2016 outfalls re-checked and about 50 “new” ones added. Again signs of pollution were found in about a quarter of outfalls and this time about 25 appeared moderately or severely polluted.

Judging progress in reducing pollution from such snapshot assessments is difficult. But this year’s Safari results do seem to confirm the impression from our regular monitoring of some outfalls that there has been a noticeable reduction in signs of pollution at many outfalls over the past 5 years. But they also show that there is much work still be done, so the expanded programme will be very important.

Some of the key findings:

- In the case of the 190 outfalls that were covered in both Safaris, there has been a marked fall since 2016 in the number of outfalls with the highest pollution score and in those exhibiting signs of mild pollution. Within these totals there are some outfalls whose appearance has improved substantially following TW investigations, such as Green Lane New Malden and Knollmead; others where pollution has reduced but there are still regular “bouts” of pollution, such as Sheephouse Way; and others still waiting for full investigation that still appear badly polluted, such as Rose Walk. The highest scoring outfall in 2016 - at California Road - is also still badly polluted.

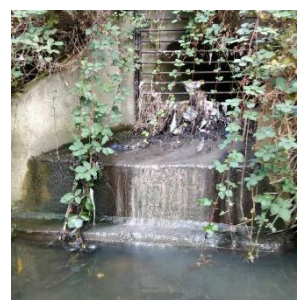


2016

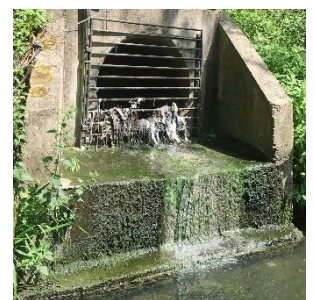


Knollmead

2021



2016



Sheephouse Way

2021



2016



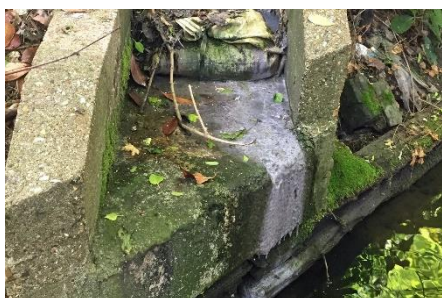
Rose Walk

2021



California Road 2021

- About 90 outfalls in the 2016 Safari were not surveyed this time. The vast majority of these were small and with no evidence of pollution in 2016. But coverage was much reduced along the Green Lanes Stream, a hotspot for outfalls and for pollution in the past, though it appears improved recently. A few outfalls that were at least moderately polluted in 2016 were missed: some of these also look to have improved but at least one, Surbiton Hill Park, remains heavily polluted;
- About 50 outfalls that were not surveyed last time were found and assessed this year. Many of these were on “hard-to-access” stretches, especially on the tributaries where some sections, especially on the Horton stream, were covered for the first time. There was no sign of pollution at most of these and none were severely polluted, but a few were found with signs of moderate pollution.



Wesley Close, Horton Stream



Raeburn Avenue, Tolworth Brook

The Safari only looked at “dry weather” pollution. It did not cover sources of “wet weather” pollution - combined sewer overflows, such as the Storm Tanks, and road run-off - both of which are likely to become increasing problems with the trend to more extremes of rainfall .