

The Hogsmill in September 2021

Another quiet month along the Hogsmill providing a “mellow” transition to autumn. At last a sight of the now “maturing” sun that has been burning off the morning “mists” in the meadows; highlighting the craft of the spinners; and lighting the path for the birds as they use the river to navigate to their evening roosts.



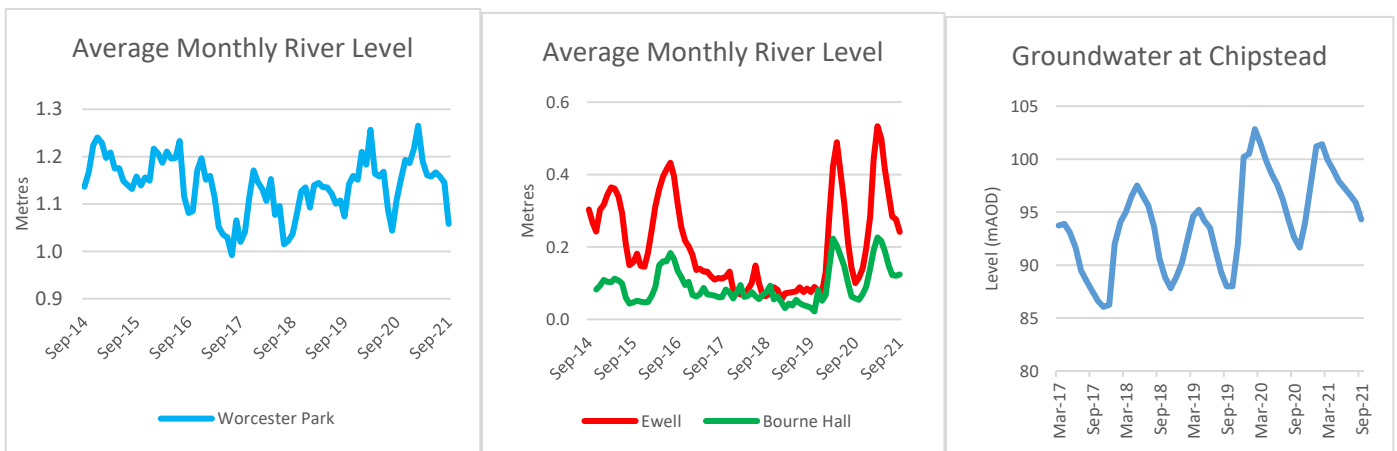
Not much sign of “fruitfulness” in the meadows this month; it’s been a poor year for many insects and berries. But there’s been a late surge in some hard-to-spot butterflies, especially brown hairstreaks, and in dragonflies. The bees have been taking advantage of the “later flowers”; there have been plenty of gnats among the “river sallows”; and the “red-breast” has emerged from its moult. (Thanks to John Keats!)



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.

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Apart from a couple of wet days, there's been little rain in the catchment since the early August deluges. As a result, the river level has fallen sharply in the past month. This is most marked downstream where "gravel banks" have emerged in several places and levels in the tributaries look particularly low. But upstream it is still well above most recent years, probably in part because groundwater in the aquifer remains relatively high from earlier rain. On the positive side, along much of the river there still seems to be a steady flow of clear water; the "scummy stagnant" stretches that often arise in dry spells are fairly limited at present.



Green Lane New Malden



Tolworth Brook



Green Lanes Ewell

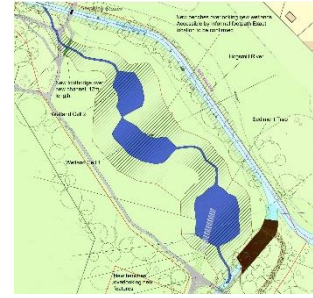
The meadows alongside the Hogsmill are now looking quite bare, but still provide an attractive picture in the autumn sun. For Chamber Mead the scene could be very different next year as the planning application for SERT's project to divert the Green Lanes stream through a new wetland in the meadow is now with Epsom and Ewell Council. This should bring environmental benefits, including significant improvements in water quality in the Hogsmill. Hopefully it will soon be approved enabling work to start next year.



Tolworth Court Farm



2021



Chamber Mead

2022?

Much of the balsam that has plagued the Hogsmill corridor is dying back, no doubt spreading seed even more widely; and there now seems to be a “second crop” sprouting often in places previously cleared by “hand or river surges”. Despite the great efforts this year by all and “sundry”, the problem is still significant and widespread, so SERT is working to develop a joined-up strategy for tackling this and other invasive species. If you’d like to contribute to this please contact Emma at SERT: emma@southeastrivertrust.org



“Old” balsam at Six Acre Meadow



“Cyril the balsam basher?”



“New” balsam at Elmbridge Meadows

As for pollution, there was a strange but short-lived “red river” incident in Ewell at the turn of the month; and as the dry spell continued, signs of pollution re-appeared at several “usual-suspect” outfalls. These now tend to be more intermittent, a positive change and testament to the work of the Environmental Team at Thames Water in identifying and tackling problems. But such pollution can still be severe and is probably harder to detect if irregular: frustratingly when the Team inspected the “pipework” near a Malden Way outfall there were few signs of pollution, but a few days later it was back with a vengeance.



Ewell
(Photo thanks to Siobhan)



Southwood Drive



Sheephouse Way



A240 downstream



New Malden Railway Bridge



"Any sewage fungus down there?"



Malden Way South

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.

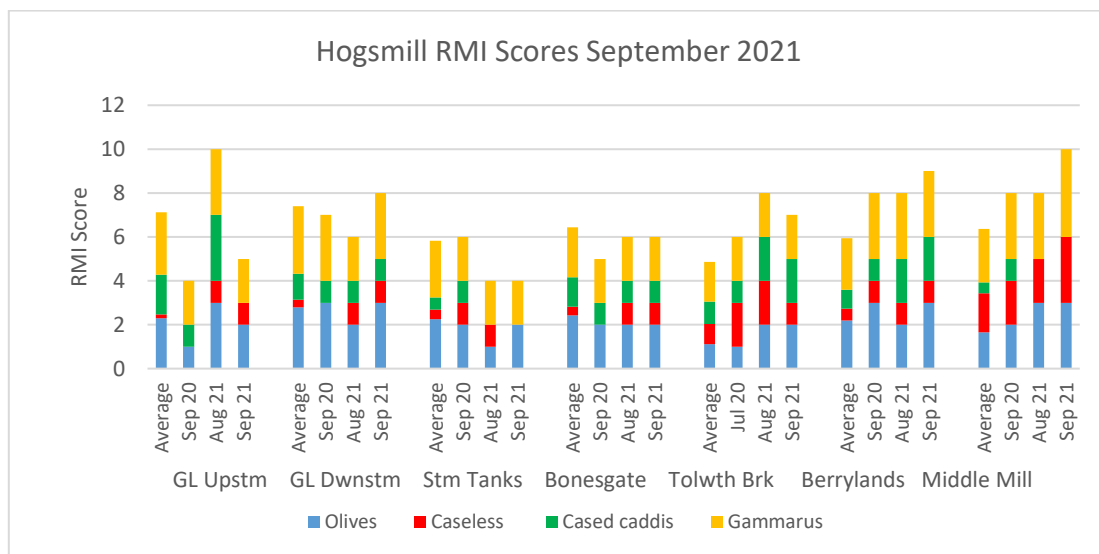
The Hogsmill, with its "moderate" ecological status, is one of many English rivers that are under threat. The Rivers Trust has just launched its State of Our Rivers Report: <https://www.theriverstrust.org/key-issues/state-of-our-rivers>. This is a great source of information on the health and problems of the Hogsmill and other rivers; and sets out options for improvements behind which it hopes to get political momentum.

Hogsmill RMI In September

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 September 16th and 24th, though with slightly different teams than normal at some sites, which *might* have affected the scoring.

Results were again mixed, this time with a contrast between high scores towards the downstream end of the river and some poor ones further upstream:



- The standout result was at Berrylands where the score of “9” was the highest for almost 2 years and involved large increases in counts of 3 species and well-above average counts for all 4. The “7” at the nearby Tolworth Brook site, again above average and with a “full-house” of 4 species, was also impressive, especially as the level and flow of water in the stream were both well down;
- At Middle Mill the score rose to “10” with large increases in counts of all 3 species found and over 1000 gammarus. But interpreting the results remains difficult and has been muddied by other recent surveys. EA’s annual survey conducted just upstream last October yielded results *broadly* similar overall to the RMI at that time, but both samples had counts *much* lower than more recent RMI’s. A May 2021 survey by the team benchmarking the Hogsmill for the “SmartRivers” project produced much lower counts and concluded that invertebrates at Middle Mil were under “significant stress” from chemical and sediment pollution and “considerable stress” from organic pollution and flow;
- At the other end of the river, upstream at Green Lanes, there was a dramatic fall in score from “10” in August to “5” this month, with large drops in all counts, but especially cased caddis with plenty of empty cases found but no “active” ones. Extensive weed makes sampling and counting very difficult here at this time of year which *could* be a factor. There were no indications of a pollution “event” and as there have been similar large drops in score at about the same time in many previous years it seems likely that this was a seasonal/life-cycle effect;
- Another “4” and breach of the “trigger” at the Storm Tanks. With the dry weather it seems unlikely there was any *new* pollution from the tanks, but this site has in the past been particularly affected by low water levels so this could be a factor;
- Counts at Bonesgate and downstream at Green Lanes were broadly similar to August;
- Amongst the species, the striking feature this month was the large number of tiny cased caddis found at some sites, especially ones with “clear trays”. As they are hard to spot it seems likely that there were more at other sites that were missed. It was also a good month for caseless caddis.



“Young *mystacides* perhaps?”



“Hello, I’m a *rhyacophila*; what are you?”

As preparation for the Hogsmill joining the “SmartRivers” project, which is essentially a more sophisticated RMI that should enable us to monitor water quality to a near-professional standard, several members of our RMI teams have this month been trained in the sampling techniques and in identifying the much wider range of invertebrates that are used in the project. A second set of samples was also taken by the project experts that will provide a benchmark for our surveys. Our first set of surveys at 5 of our sites is scheduled for next spring; in the meantime we’ll be swotting up on the difference between *hydropsyche* and *rhyacophila*!



“You put your left foot in...”



“I’ve spotted a *limnephilus* in here!”

London Rivers Week and other forthcoming events

Thames-21’s annual London Rivers Week will take place from October 23rd to 31st and will feature a range of events across London to showcase what has been done to restore rivers and to encourage further efforts to promote its blue and green spaces. More details are on: thames21.org.uk/events

Along the Hogsmill, SERT is running guided walks along the river from Ewell, covering the problems it faces and work being done to improve the habitat. These are scheduled for the mornings of October 10th and 28th. SERT is also organising a river clean-up along the Green Lanes Stream on October 1st. More details and to book a place, which is essential, go to: <https://www.southeastriverstrust.org/events>

An Open Day is being held at Thames Water’s [Hogsmill Nature Reserve](#) in Berrylands from 11 to 3 on October 28th. There will be activities for children, such as pond-dipping, and talks as well as opportunities to view the wildlife. For further information contact Kristine at TW: kristine.boudreau@thameswater.co.uk

Also of interest, on October 13th at 7 p.m. Joe Pecorelli from ZSL will be giving a talk on ‘Fixing London’s Rivers’ at the autumn meeting of the Kingston Biodiversity Network. To book a place at this online event go to: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/fixing-londons-rivers-with-joe-pecorelli-tickets-173271829707>