

The Hogsmill in May 2022

Quite a gentle ending to spring this month. The sun has brought out the best of the later flowering trees by the Hogsmill while an “explosion” of cow parsley has provided great camouflage for orange tip butterflies.



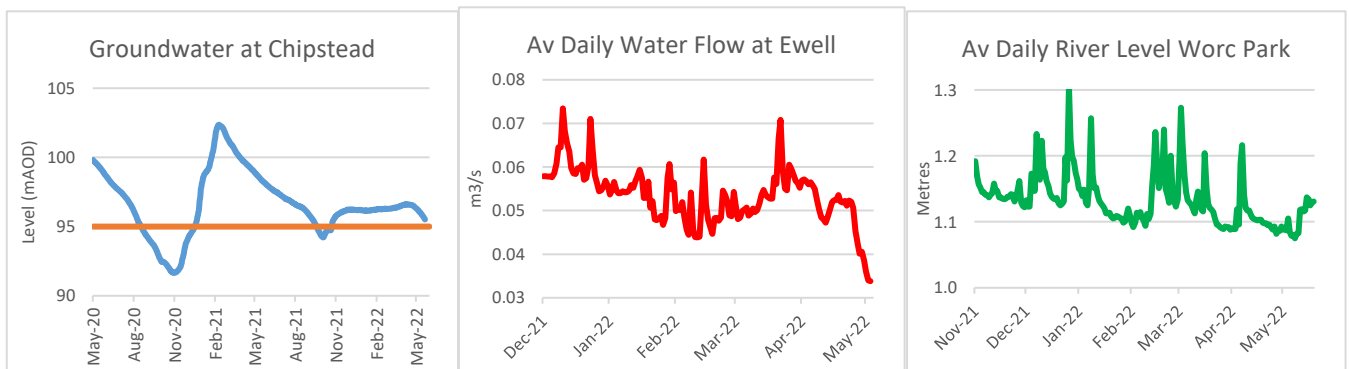
It’s been the “cute and fluffy” stage on the water: a dangerous time for young chicks, especially with the “big bad” herons on the prowl, so the wiser ones have stayed close to their parents. But while there have been losses, at least all of the Bourne Hall “gang of 11” goslings have made it to “teenage” size.



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, especially Thames Water (TW).

The Hogsmill in May

Despite predictions of downpours, it's been yet another month with low rainfall. The impact of the long dry spell is now being felt by the Hogsmill: groundwater in the aquifer is falling steadily and is now close to the "trigger point" where the springs tend to dry up; and the water flow at Ewell has recently dropped sharply. The impact at the upstream end of the river is now clearly visible; and to add to the upstream "woes", the water in Bourne Hall Lake has turned bright blue for reasons that are a mystery but don't look "natural".



Horse Pond



Lower Mill "falls"



Bourne Hall Lake

Further downstream the effect is less obvious so far and perhaps surprisingly there is still a steady flow of water down the tributaries. But at a number of our sampling sites the water was at its lowest level for about a year and at several locations gravel or mud banks are now visible above the water line.



Bonesgate confluence



Elmbridge Meadows



Bonesgate - Park Farm



Tolworth Brook

Also perhaps surprising with the dry weather is that the river banks and meadows seem particularly lush and green at present, though the vigorous growth is highlighting that some “wild” meadows are being taken over by bushes, mainly turkey oak and blackthorn, a consequence of the recent reduced frequency of mowing.



Old Malden



Six Acre Meadow



Long Meadow

On volunteering, the summer monitoring of eels migrating up the Hogsmill and caught in the “trap” at Middle Mill in Kingston resumed this month. It had an inauspicious start as all that was found on the first check was a mitten crab, which can cause major ecological damage. But several eels have been recorded subsequently. Unfortunately this was not the only “unwelcome visitor” to the river this month as another signal crayfish was spotted, this time a much larger one near the confluence of the Tolworth Brook.



(Photo thanks to Phil)

(Photo thanks to Patrick)

A new project funded by the Greater London Authority to investigate options for rewilding Tolworth Court Farm Fields will provide great opportunities for volunteer and community engagement. The site is already a natural highlight in the Hogsmill corridor with extensive grasslands and thickets that support a wide range of wildlife, especially birds and butterflies, but it has the potential to be one of London’s best nature reserves. The first stage will involve extensive ecological surveys, including community surveys and sampling days, the first being on June 1st and July 1st covering earthworms, hoverflies and spiders: https://www.field-studies-council.org/biolinks-courses/?fwp_keyword_search=tolworth A walk to highlight the flora and fauna in the Reserve is being held on the evening of June 21st : <https://www.eventbrite.com/.../summer-walks-tolworth>



Tolworth Court Farm Fields

The dry weather has again highlighted the extent of continuing outfall pollution along the Hogsmill. The most notable cases this month have been along the tributaries, including a “newly-identified” polluting outfall by the Watersedge Estate on the Bonesgate and “renewed” pollution along the Tolworth Brook. Better news is that there weren’t any signs of significant pollution at the many outfalls along the Green Lanes Stream, which in the past was a “hotspot” for problems.



Rowden Road

Bonesgate

Ashby Ave

Longford Court

Raeburn Ave

Tol Brook

King Charles Road

(Photos thanks to Emma)

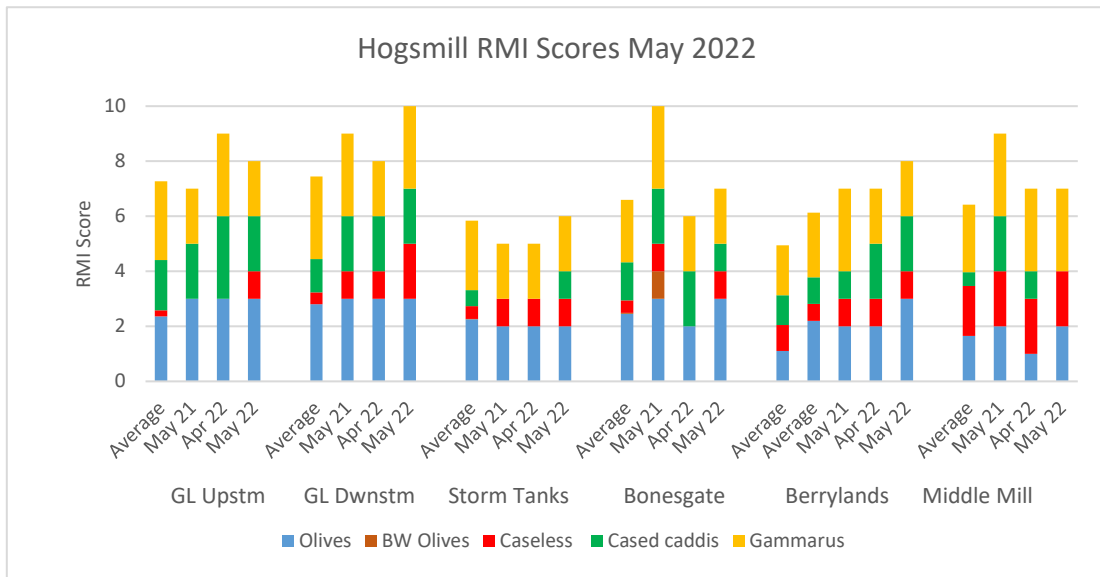
(Photo thanks to Patrick)

If you see pollution in 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. You can also contact Thames Water on: 0800 316 9800 (option 2); on: www.thameswater.co.uk/help/emergencies/pollution; or on twitter: [@thameswater](https://twitter.com/thameswater).

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.

The 6 main Hogsmill sites were surveyed between May 11th and 14th, with the samples at 5 preserved for further lab analysis as part of the SMART rivers project. The scores from the riverside analysis were all above the long-term average and overall largely recovered from last month’s dip. Preliminary analysis of the preserved samples suggests that at least in some cases numbers were underestimated at the riverside:



- the best score was the “10” downstream at Green Lanes, only the second time this has been recorded at this site. May tends to be a high-scoring month here, and this time there were some large increases in numbers, especially of gammarus where the count was the highest for nearly a year;
- scores at Bonesgate, Berrylands and the Ewell Storm Tanks all improved slightly while that upstream at Green Lanes fell slightly, but apart from a large jump in olive numbers at Berrylands, these were largely based on fairly small changes in numbers around the “band boundaries”
- paradoxically the most striking change amongst the species was a near-halving in the total count of cased caddis, with the “tiny sticks” found in large numbers in recent months largely absent though we still found some impressive specimens. A summer drop after a spring surge is normal, but it looks to be happening earlier than usual this year.

Finally, farewell and thanks to Jess who after managing the Hogsmill RMI for 4 years is leaving SERT.



(Photo thanks to Robb)