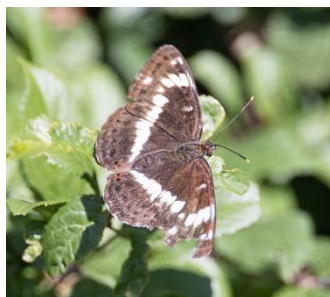


The Hogsmill in July 2022

The exceptionally hot and dry conditions have made it a difficult time for nature along the Hogsmill corridor. Many wildflowers blooming at the start of the month withered rapidly leaving only a few pockets of hardy species, like ragwort, in otherwise barren meadows. Even the nettles and scrub along the banks have started to die back, so it is now largely only close to the water that there are signs of vibrant verdant growth.



At least the sun led to a boom in numbers of the Hogsmill's regular summer butterfly species, though in some cases this looks like being unusually short-lived. There have also been sightings of much less common species, with even a rare visit from an "emperor" descending from its "throne" in the treetops.



White admiral

Purple emperor
(Photo thanks to Pamela)

Small tortoiseshell

Silver-washed fritillary

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.

The Hogsmill in July

It's been another month with negligible rain: the area total since the start of spring has been half the long-term average. The Ewell springs have now completely dried up, though the empty channel from one has been brightened by lovely "toppers"! Major repair works to strengthen the banks and remove silt from the Ewell "Ponds" has also affected the Ewell end of the Hogsmill. But water company augmentation has sustained good levels of water in the Mill Ponds and Bourne Hall Lake.

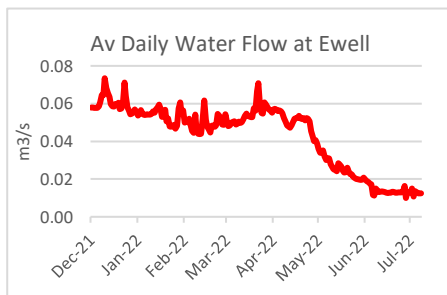


Upper Mill Pond

Horse Pond

Bourne Hall Lake

The flow of water from the "Ponds" into the Hogsmill has been erratic this month, presumably because of the works, but augmentation has halted the steep decline seen in recent months, though this flow is well down on early 2022. Surprisingly water is still flowing down the tributaries, albeit in reduced amounts. So while water levels have fallen further at points along the main river, there is still some flow of mostly clear water along much of its length. It is perhaps a moot point whether this year's low flows have so far been more damaging to the river environment than the "flash storm surges" that hit the river last July.



Ewell Court

Bonesgate confluence



25 July 2021

Church Bridge

25 July 2022

25 July 2021

Sheephouse Way

25 July 2022

Removing Himalayan balsam has again been a priority this month and while there is still plenty around, our intrepid “bashers” look to have cleared more of this “invader” this year than before. During London Rivers Week a team from EA helped install a deflector and plant “bed” in a barren stretch of the river by the A3, though plans for further work were halted by the local wasps! Walks organised during the Week also provided opportunities to gain inspiration from restoration work on other London rivers; for example, that on the Crane at Twickenham: despite the lack of water, this has produced some colourful riverbanks.



“Bonesgate bashing”
(Photo thanks to Phil)



“Southboro deflector”



“Look out for wasps, Elliot!!”



“Crane flowers”

Many outfalls remain dried up, but there have been indications of pollution at a few more this month, including some that had looked clear for some time. Most seemed fairly minor, though at Malden Way it was sufficiently serious for TW to install a boom to try to contain the downriver spread.



Malden Way South



Portland Road



Knollmead



Middle Mill

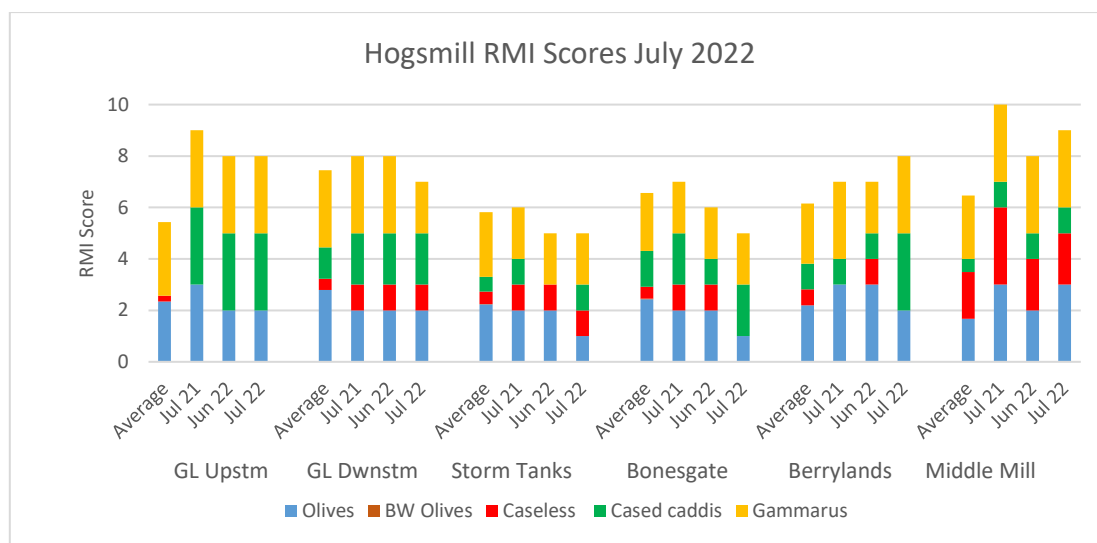
If you see pollution in the river or indications of possible pollution, such as dying fish, please call the EA Hotline: 0800 80 70 60, and ideally take a photo. You can also contact Thames Water on: 0800 316 9800 (option 2); on: www.thameswater.co.uk/help/emergencies/pollution; or on twitter: [@thameswater](https://twitter.com/thameswater).

Good news for pollution reduction is that the Chamber Mead Wetlands Project led by SERT has this month been approved by Epsom and Ewell Council. This will involve diverting the Green Lanes Stream, currently polluted by road run-off and sewage, through new wetlands in the meadow that will filter pollution, before entering the Hogsmill further downstream. It is hoped that the wetlands will be created in 2023.

Hogsmill RMI In July

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-river sites were surveyed between July 13th and 16th, before the “extreme heat peak” but still with high water temperatures. The results were mixed and puzzling: there were small changes in score in both directions, though the overall average was similar to June. But underlying were falls in counts, some large, for 3 of our “usual species” at most sites that were broadly offset by a surge in cased caddis numbers.



- The highest score was again at Middle Mill, the site least affected by dry weather as much of the flow is STW effluent. The increase to a “9” was based on a large rise in the olive count, but was still below the “10s” in the last 3 Julys. It is not obvious why scores are so high at this time of year; perhaps the large amounts of summer weed found here attract invertebrates to the site;
- There was also an increase in score at Berrylands, the result of a record cased caddis count and a large rise in gammarus numbers. Despite the dry conditions, there was still a reasonable depth and flow of water at the time of sampling - surprisingly the measured level was slightly higher than June;
- At the Green Lanes sites, where the water level was markedly down on June, there were falls in all counts bar one, though these were mostly within “score bands”. The exception was cased caddis where there was a large increase to a record count at the upstream site;
- The scores at both Ewell Storm Tanks and Bonesgate were “5” and breaches of the “trigger” were only avoided by unusually high cased caddis counts. These sites have relatively shallow water even in normal times, and at both the water level was notably down this month;

- Amongst the species, the striking and surprising result was the very large increase in cased caddis numbers, most of which were small “sticks”. The *recorded* total for the 6 sites was almost three times the previous record, though as caddis are hard to count accurately when numbers are large and this month they were very active in the trays, this needs to be treated with caution. Nonetheless there is little doubt that *actual* numbers were exceptionally high in July. The reason for this – and for the unusually high counts at several sites since the spring – are unclear: perhaps the lack of storm surges and unusually warm water recently have contributed, but this is just a guess;
- By contrast, leaving aside a couple of “outlying” big jumps, total olive and gammarus numbers fell to only about a third of their June levels at 5 sites while caseless caddis numbers fell at all sites. So something strange seems to be happening with our critters!



Berrylands



A few from the “suit-case”

Bonesgate



Ewell Storm Tanks (photo thanks to Robb)

For those who can't face holiday queues there'll be plenty going on along the Hogsmill in the next few weeks. The [GetInvolved](#) Project to reintroduce water voles into the Hogsmill is reaching its climax with the first release scheduled for the end of August and a celebration [FestiVOLE](#) on September 3rd. Help would be welcome with preparations for the release, including mink and latrine raft building on August 9th, planting at the STW release site on August 18th and feeding the voles in their pens in the week before release. Training is also scheduled for those who'd like to help with post-release monitoring: rafts on August 20th and camera trap and acoustic sensors on August 23rd. Details and how to book are on the Citizen Zoo website: <https://www.citizenzoo.org/water-voles/>

Further activities in the project to Rewild Tolworth Court Farm are also planned for next month: another Field Recorder's Day on August 5th, this time on ants and harvestmen, and a bat walk on August 9th. Details are again on the Citizen Zoo site: <https://www.citizenzoo.org/wild-tolworth/>

A date for the diary further ahead: on November 3rd, ZSL will once again be hosting an event at London Zoo, for volunteers that have helped with ZSL projects over the past year. This is always a great opportunity to meet other volunteers and to see a whole range of critters, big and small.