

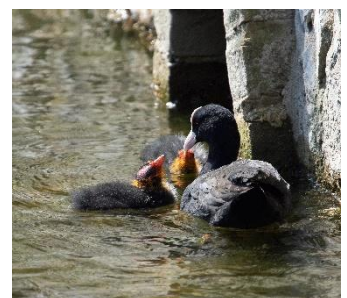
The Hogsmill in May 2023

At last “real” Spring has arrived along the Hogsmill and this year it’s been a spectacular one, especially with some sun to help enjoy it. It seems as if almost overnight the trees and meadows turned lush and vivid green; the banks were engulfed by new tall growth; and there was a burst of late blossom. To crown it all, red, white and blue critters have been displaying by the banks and there’s even been a glimpse of gold!



(Photo thanks to Richard)

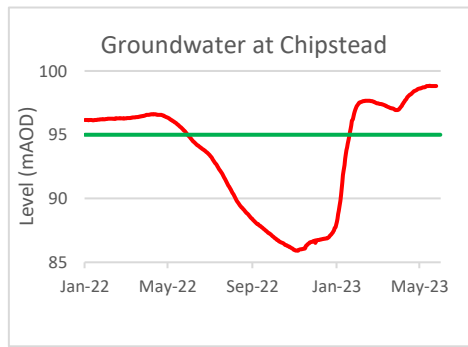
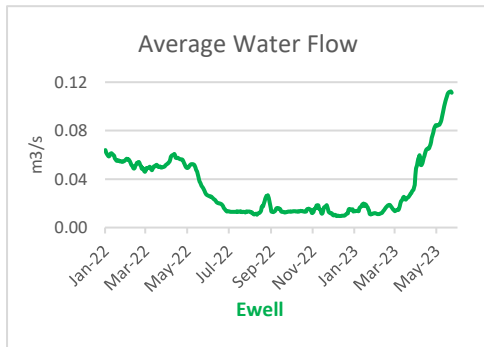
It’s been family time along the river; and while there seem to be fewer youngsters this year, there have still been plenty of both the “cute and fluffy” and the “ugly and weird” to be seen in and around the water.



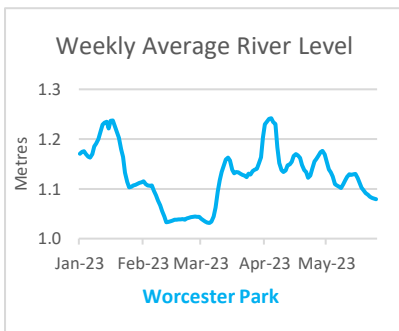
This newsletter looks at what is happening to the natural world along the Hogsmill, including the problems it faces and volunteer activities to monitor and restore its habitat, working with the South East Rivers Trust (SERT) and other local groups and alongside the Environment Agency (EA) and local water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

The Hogsmill in May

It's been a relatively dry month along the Hogsmill, but the flow of "pure" water from the Ewell springs has continued to rise thanks to the boost to groundwater from the wet start to the year. With top-up of the Mill Pond still switched on, water has been cascading over the "falls" into the river. The level of water in the aquifer seems to have peaked, but it is still some way above that at which the springs tend to dry up.



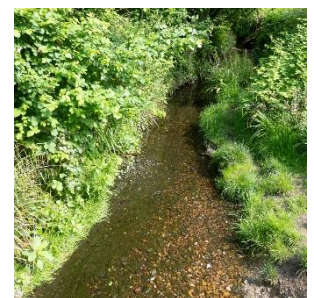
Downstream the benefits of the springs are evident in a steady flow of mostly clear water. But after only a couple of weeks without rain the river level has fallen back as the ground has dried up surprisingly quickly and water in the tributaries has dropped to little more than a trickle. Also there are early signs of the summer "curses" of algae and weed: Bourne Hal Lake and the Mill Ponds are already becoming smothered in "green slime" despite the springs flowing; and blanket weed is "choking" the downstream section of the river, though elsewhere the weed at least adds an attractive gloss to the water.



Hogsmill New Malden
(Photo thanks to Phil)



Bonesgate



Tolworth Brook



Bourne Hall Lake



Middle Mill



Ewell

It's been a good month for spring flowers along the Hogsmill: "candles" in the sky; "flags" in the water; and buttercup "carpets" and cranesbill in the meadows. Hopefully the lush growth will help insects, many of which have had a hard time. After a slow start they are now appearing, notably more damselflies than usual for this time of year: perhaps starting life in water, where we've been finding plenty in our samples, has protected them from extreme conditions. Tiny flies have also been swarming around the river, providing food for the 2 species of pipistrelle that were found on this month's bat walk around Six Acre Meadow.



(Photo thanks to Simeon)

There haven't been reports of major pollution incidents this month, and despite the dry weather the "regular polluting" outfalls have generally looked clear. But the one spell of moderate rain in early May triggered a short overflow at the CSO at the Hogsmill STW; the Knollmead outfall that had been signed off after investigation looks to have a "new" misconnection; and there was a small oil spill near Six Acre Meadow.



Knollmead



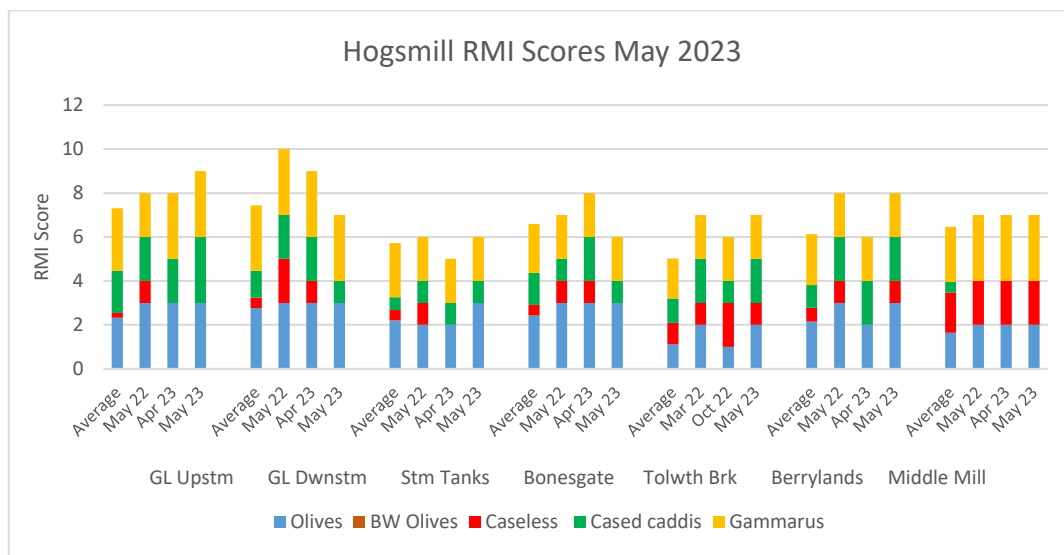
Six Acre Meadow
(Photo thanks to Robyn)

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); or 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 that uses “scores” based on counts of a few “water quality sensitive” invertebrates collected in net samples to assess river health.

All 7 of our sites, including that on the Tolworth Brook, were surveyed between May 18th and 22nd. There were changes in scores in both directions, but the overall average score for the main river sites was unchanged from April. There were though some quite large increases in counts, particularly of olives:



- The best result was upstream at Green Lanes Stream where counts of olive and gammarus were both around record levels. This *could* partly reflect the benefits to water quality of the springs flowing again, though it still seems early for these to have had a marked effect on invertebrate numbers;
- The score also rose at Berrylands, again partly the result of a large rise in the olive count. The “8” was similar to the scores found last Spring so perhaps the mysterious run of mediocre counts and scores stretching back to last summer has come to an end;
- Scores at Bonesgate and downstream at Green Lanes were both down by 2 “points”, but this reflected small falls in caddis numbers with olives up substantially so neither change looks significant;
- The score at Ewell Storm Tanks was also boosted by a big jump in olives. That at Middle Mill was unchanged, but an early “invasion” of blanket weed made sampling and counting very hard;
- The “7” with a full house of species at Tolworth Brook looks good for what is only a small stream. We don’t have regular surveys here, but this is consistent with results over the last couple of years that have been much better than when sampling started in 2017 when the typical score was “4”;
- Amongst the species, the striking result was the very large number of olives with big rises at all sites. Although it is particularly hard to produce accurate counts in trays teeming with often tiny olives, the total recorded for the 6 main river sites was easily the highest since recording began.

Smartening up the Hogsmill

This month has seen a pick-up in Hogsmill restoration work. Scouts joined the local community to remove litter and clear paths along the banks in Malden Manor as part of the Coronation Big Help-Out. A 'Rewild London' project to improve the Hogsmill Wood Nature Reserve was kicked off: this small enclosed area on the banks by the A3 has great potential but has been blighted by fly-tipping and the absence of habitat management. This month the "Moles" volunteers built a dead-hedge, improved internal access and installed signs and a bench. A Field Recorders Day to record the site's wildlife is scheduled for Jun 14th - you can book at: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/field-recorder-day-tickets-615081484277>. Further work to improve the site is planned for later in the year and it is hoped that a volunteer group will then take this forward.



Malden Manor Help-Out



Hogsmill Wood



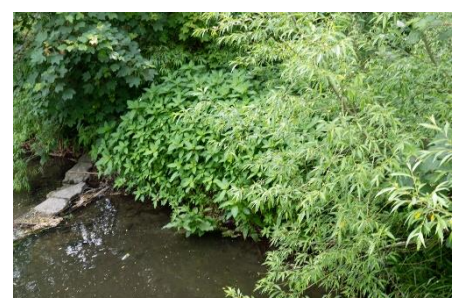
More events are planned for June, particularly to tackle Himalayan balsam, which after a slow start is now shooting up along the banks. This year the focus will again be on upstream "sources": the Bonesgate and close to the confluence. The "Moles" will be running "bashes" on 14th and 15th June, meeting at 10 a.m. at Colne Court on the Watersedge Estate; for more information contact: mole.project@surreycc.gov.uk. Epsom & Ewell Council will be running "bashes" on 8th and 15th June covering the stretch from the Bonesgate confluence to the Hogsmill Tavern, meeting at 10 a.m. at the Curtis Road playground; for more information contact Lindsay: lcoomber@epsom-ewell.gov.uk. There is also plenty of balsam elsewhere. Further events are planned downstream on the main river, the Tolworth Brook and the upstream sections of the Bonesgate; and the experiment with rust fungus will be continued. Help is always welcome to tackle this "invasive menace" so look out for details; or just "pull and snap" if you see any balsam by the river.



Himalayan balsam



Long Meadow



Hogsmill Wood