

# The Hogsmill in April 2023

Grey skies and showers have again been the norm along the Hogsmill this month, but the few spells of sun and warmth have been enough to bring spring staples like blackthorn, celandine and bluebells into flower and at last the predominant colour on the banks has become green rather than winter grey/brown.



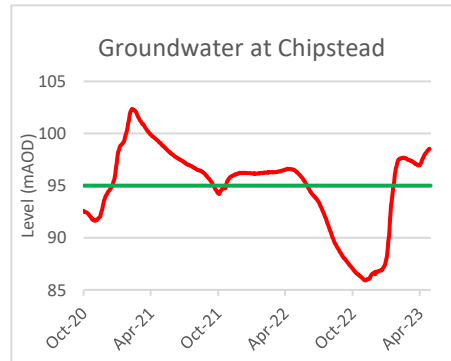
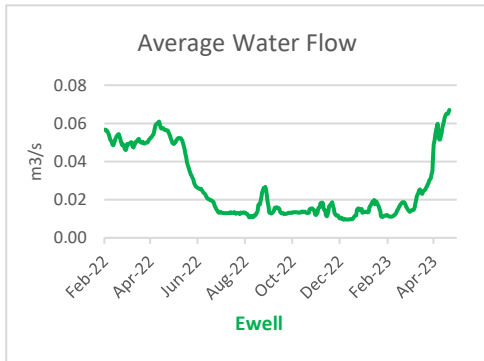
There's more good news. With all the rain, the Hogsmill has become a "proper" chalk stream again as the Ewell springs have started flowing for the first time since last May. Water vole tracks have been found at a number of locations providing the first firm evidence of the success of last autumn's release. While still not numerous, butterflies and warblers have finally appeared, with the latter contributing to an impressive tree-top chorus in which blackcaps and thrushes have been in particularly fine voice.



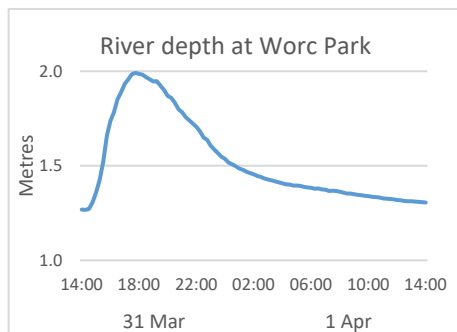
This newsletter looks at what is happening to the natural world along the Hogsmill, including the problems it faces and volunteer activities to monitor and restore its habitat, working with the South East Rivers Trust (SERT) and other local groups and alongside the Environment Agency (EA) and local water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

## The Hogsmill in April

The “re-awakening” of the springs at the start of April provided a strong boost to the level and flow of water down the upstream stretch of the river. The level of the aquifer has also started rising again and is now at its highest level for almost 2 years. With twice the average rainfall in March and another relatively wet time this month, hopefully there’ll be enough water to keep the springs flowing for some time to come.



A prolonged downpour on March 31<sup>st</sup> deposited 1½ inches of rain along the Hogsmill producing a large “flash surge” down the river. The water reached and in some cases topped footbridges across the river; and the recorded level at Worcester Park rose to a value exceeded only once before in over 10 years of monitoring.

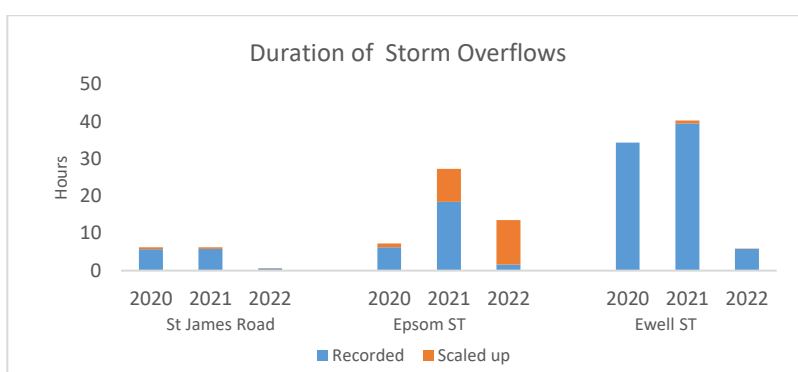
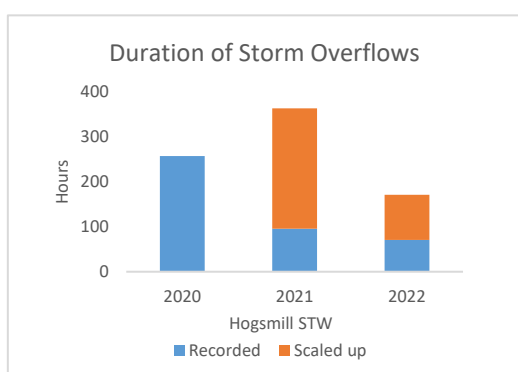


But the surge was short-lived, largely dispersing within 24 hours after which its main visible legacy was the rubbish in bankside bushes. While it’s been a wet April, much of the rain has been in short, steady spells – the “right sort” for the river - that have produced a good but fairly stable level and flow of mostly clear water down the river. The large amounts of rain have though meant that the surrounding land areas have become saturated with extensive pools of water that are well beyond anything seen at this time in recent years.



The downpour on Mar 31<sup>st</sup> was followed by a discharge from the Hogsmill STW Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) lasting almost 24 hours. This *could* explain the rag and sewage smell found downstream at Middle Mill during RMI sampling, though this was 2 weeks later. There was a further spill on April 24<sup>th</sup> after another spell of heavy rain. The Ewell Storm Tanks also overflowed on the 31<sup>st</sup>. The monitor at the Epsom Tanks has been out of service for a month so it's not known whether there have been any discharges there.

New EA data shows that the 4 Hogsmill CSOs were *recorded* as spilling for a total of about 80 hours in 2022. But this seems bound to be an underestimate as the monitors weren't working for long periods – more than half the year at the STW; crudely scaling up by the time they were off-line gives a total of nearly 200 hours. These figures were though only about half those for 2021, probably reflecting the much drier weather last year. Discharges were also well down in 2022 in neighbouring rivers – Beverley Brook, Wandle and Mole.



There haven't been new reports of pollution at other outfalls, though with the regular rain this would have been hard to spot anyway.

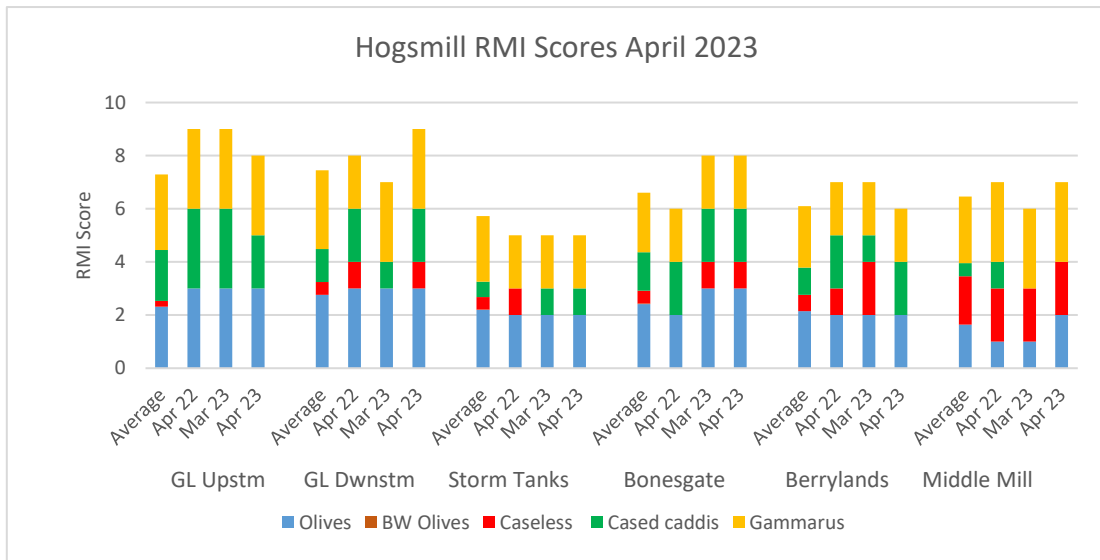
If you see pollution in the river or indications of possible pollution, such as dying fish, please call the EA Hotline: 0800 80 70 60, and ideally take a photo. You can also contact Thames Water on: 0800 316 9800 (option 2); on: [www.thameswater.co.uk/help/emergencies/pollution](http://www.thameswater.co.uk/help/emergencies/pollution);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

## Hogsmill RMI in April

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.

The 6 main-river sites were surveyed between April 12<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>, a wider spread than normal but all in fairly similar river conditions with good water levels and flows. Another century this month, this time downstream at Green Lanes.

Overall the results were similar to March with some small changes in counts leading to a few minor shifts in scores, so the water turbulence at the start of the month doesn't seem to have had a noticeable impact:



- The best results were again at Green Lanes Stream though it is too soon for any effect from the springs re-starting. An interesting feature was a large fall in the count of cased caddis at the upstream site. Every year here there is a sharp rise to 100+ that usually lasts for about 3 months before tailing off. Normally this starts in about March, but this year the jump occurred in January. So it looks as if something – perhaps weird weather over the last year – has affected the timing of their life-cycle;
- Another good score, an “8”, at Bonesgate. For 6 months in a row there’s been a “full-house” of species and only small changes in counts of all 4. This is perhaps surprising at a site that on the face of it looks particularly likely to be affected by the fluctuations in water levels and the vagaries of the Bonesgate over the past few months;
- Scores at Berrylands and Middle Mill were again close to the average with some but not major changes in counts; and no obvious impact as yet at the latter from the STW CSO spill. Notable at both were low olive numbers now lasting for 6 months, though these picked up slightly in April;
- The score at Ewell Storm Tanks was unchanged, but the counts were particularly low. The total number of invertebrates found was the lowest for nearly 3 years, *possibly* linked to the discharge from the Tanks, though this was 3 weeks earlier;
- Amongst the critters, an impressive variety of cased caddis species was found this month, but less welcome was another signal crayfish at Bonesgate.

