

## The Hogsmill in June 2023

It's felt like summer with a tropical tinge along the Hogsmill this month. With plenty of humidity and the occasional storm, lush verdant growth has continued on the river banks, seasonal flowers have bloomed in the meadows and navigating riverside paths has become a jungle trek.



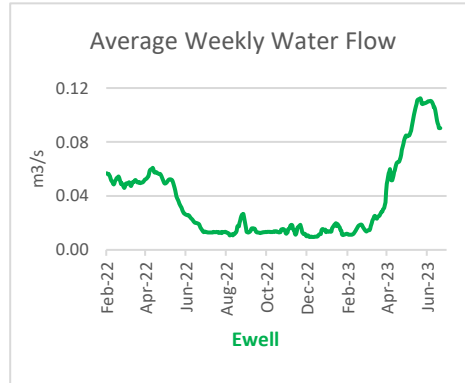
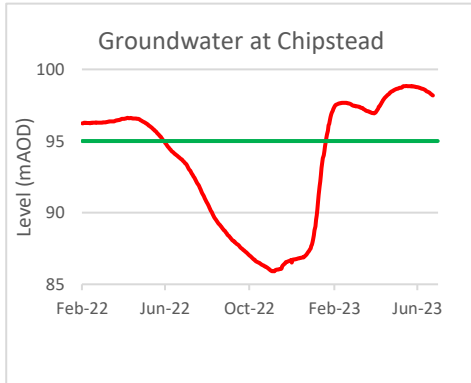
Our singleton birds have been out by the river singing loudly and seemingly care-free, while those with families have had more to cope with; some still appearing serene though protective while others have been looking harrassed dealing with unruly youngsters swimming off or pretending to be helpless.



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.

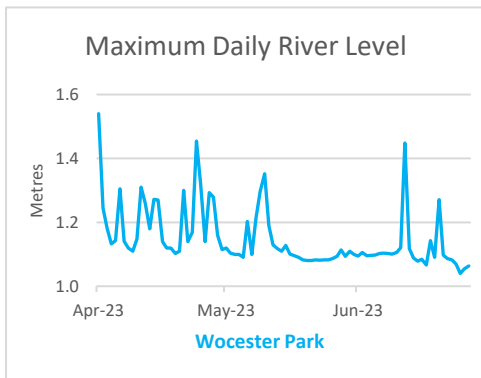
## The Hogsmill in June

Apart from a few localised storms it's been dry along the Hogsmill since mid-May. This is beginning to have an impact: groundwater is dropping and the flow from the Ewell springs is falling. But the flow is still strong and hopefully there is enough in the aquifer to keep the springs going for a while longer. The "green slime" in Bourne Hall Lake became more extensive early in the month but this then improved, though whether it was the resumption of the fountain, the storms or chemical treatment that did the trick is not clear.



Bourne Hall Lake June 17th

Downstream the river level held up well until late in the month and there's mostly been a stable and steady flow of clear water – ideal for our fisher friends! But a couple of the storms, especially that on the 12<sup>th</sup>, led to large surges down the river. These were very short-lived with the level back to normal again in less than 12 hours, though they probably contributed to higher than usual levels of sandy silt on the riverbed.



Green Lane New Malden



Six Acre Meadow  
(June 12<sup>th</sup>)



Bonesgate confluence

Particularly noticeable along the Hogsmill greenspace this month has been the continuing very high and vigorous growth of riverside plants: nettles, hogweed, brambles, thistles, balsam, etc. have all shot up much more than usual. In the meadows there has been a good variety of summer flowers and very tall grass that stayed surprisingly green despite the dry spell, though it is now "browning" fast. The appearance is quite a contrast to last June during the very hot dry spell but similar to the relatively wet summer 2 years ago. So plant life seems to be showing some resilience to the weird weather we've been having.





June 2020

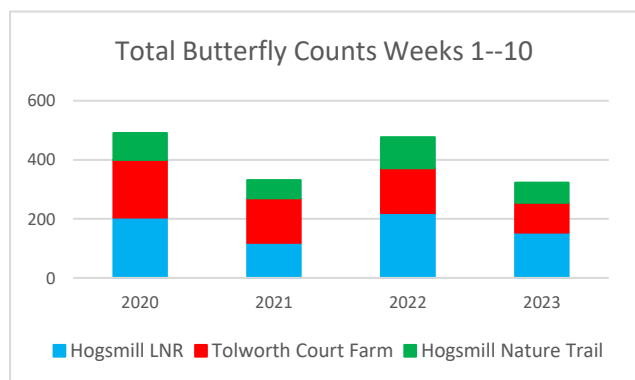
June 2021

Long Meadow

June 2022

June 2023

But despite this resilience, it's been a poor year for many insects along the Hogsmill so far, probably largely



the legacy of last summer's drought. A good example is butterflies where spring (April-early June) counts at the 3 Hogsmill "transects" with systematic recording of numbers – the Ewell Local Nature Reserve, Tolworth Court Farm and the Old Malden Nature Trail - were all down by about one-third compared to 2022. These counts provide a good illustration of the lingering impact

of dry weather as spring counts were also well down in 2021 following dry conditions the previous year.

There are though some positive signs: summer species of butterfly emerged in mid-June in what look to be quite large numbers, including the eye-catching marbled white, a particular Hogsmill highlight that looks to be especially numerous this year. There have also been sightings of small tortoiseshells, sadly a species in significant decline, and on the fringes of the Catchment of black hairstreaks, a very rare species.



Marbled White



Skipper



Meadow Brown



Small Tortoiseshell



Black Hairstreak  
(Photo thanks to Pamela)

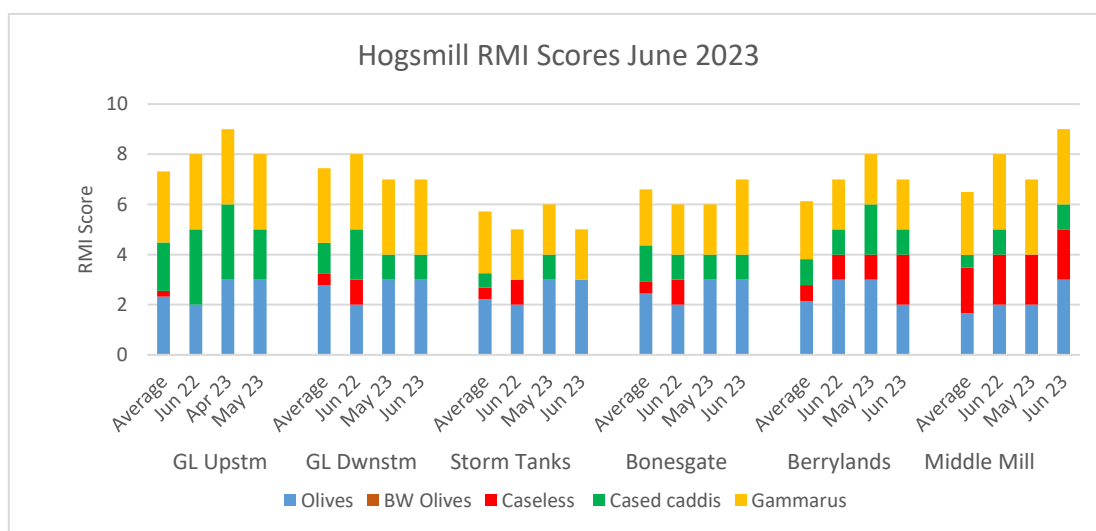
On pollution, the storm on June 12<sup>th</sup> appears to have been particularly intense along downstream sections of the river and was followed by short discharges from the Combined Sewer Overflow(CSO) at the Hogsmill STW and also, unusually, at that at St James’ Road in Kingston. Further discharges at the STW were recorded by TW on the 16<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>, days when there was little or no rain. There have been mostly minor signs of pollution at several “usual suspect” outfalls, but none have been out of the ordinary.

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](http://www.thameswater.co.uk/help/emergencies/pollution); or on twitter: [@thameswater](https://twitter.com/thameswater).

## Hogsmill RMI in June

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 June 15<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>. Again there were changes in scores in both directions, but the overall average was just over 7 for the third month running:



- The highest score this month was the “9” at Middle Mill driven mainly by a high olive count. Scores always rise here in the summer for reasons that are not clear but could be linked to the build-up of weed which *might* provide shelter for invertebrates, so the result is not that surprising;
- At the other end of the river at the Green Lanes sites, there were some marked drops from May’s exceptionally high olive and gammarus counts, especially downstream, but the scores at both were still fairly close to the averages for these sites;
- Results at the Ewell Storm Tanks and Bonesgate were broadly similar to last month;
- It was another bumper month for olives overall, though this time the counts were much more variable with some large increases but also some marked falls; while cased caddis numbers fell.



## Improving the Hogsmill

It's been a busy month for activities along the Hogsmill. It was great to see an EA team return for another day of restoration work on the neglected Southwood section by the A3. They created an aquatic ledge to ease the effect of the steep banks, something that will complement the deflector they installed last year that has already had a big impact improving water flow. They also built a bee bank and a hibernaculum.



Aquatic ledge



Deflector



Bee bank

It seemed like an army was out pulling up Himalayan balsam this month, often in challenging conditions, taking forward the SERT co-ordinated strategy to reduce the spread and abundance of this invasive species. Thanks to the Lower Mole Partnership, Epsom and Ewell Countryside Team, Kingston University, Kingston Ramblers, Kingston Council, Habitats and Heritage, Friends of Berrylands Nature Reserve, Citizen Zoo and others for organising “bashes” and for many more individual contributions that have made a real difference. More “bashes” are planned for July, but as balsam is reaching the “attractive but dangerous” flowering stage this will need to be done with caution to avoid spreading seed.

Another part of the strategy is biological control though the use of a rust fungus that damages plants and hinders seed production. Last year a small test plot was sprayed with fungus spores. There were some signs that this was having an impact; and this month a further area has been sprayed that will now be monitored. While not a panacea, hopefully this will provide a useful additional tool for slowing the spread of balsam.



“Bashing”



Balsam flowers



“ Fungus control”

This month new wildlife surveys have been undertaken, a key tool for understanding the impact of rapidly changing conditions. The Biological Recording Company held a Field Recorders' Day in the wooded areas and meadows by the river on either side of the A3. Their experts confirmed the impression of a paucity of insect life this year, but also had some notable "catches", such as a crab spider devouring a signal fly! Following on from last year's Hogwatch project, the Institute of Zoology is undertaking a comprehensive wildlife camera survey of large stretches of the Hogsmill greenspace. Already this is producing interesting insights into the more elusive wildlife by the river: plenty of foxes, hedgehogs and even badgers.



(Photo thanks to IoZ)