

The Hogsmill in September 2023

It's been back to extremes in conditions this month, but there've been plenty of positives. The Hogsmill has been awarded a Species Recovery Grant to restore habitat for wildlife, launched at a visit by the Chairman of Natural England; and at last there's been some sun to highlight early autumn scenes along the river.



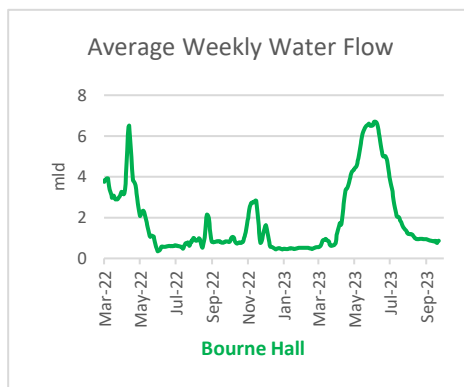
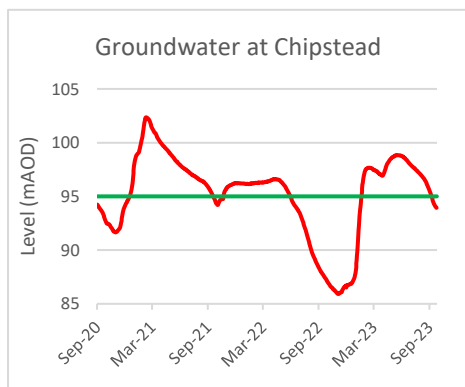
The sun has also extended the season for some of our summer residents and provided a warm welcome for autumn wildlife from ivy bees to the Sussexes taking their normal September holiday at Moated Manor.



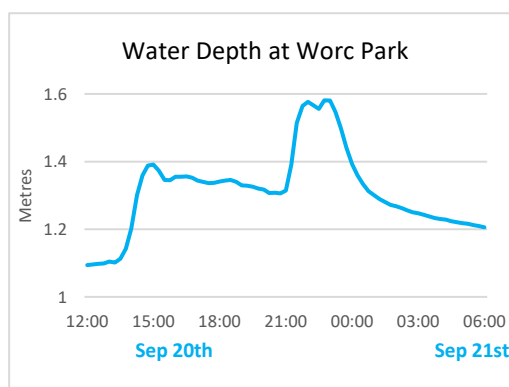
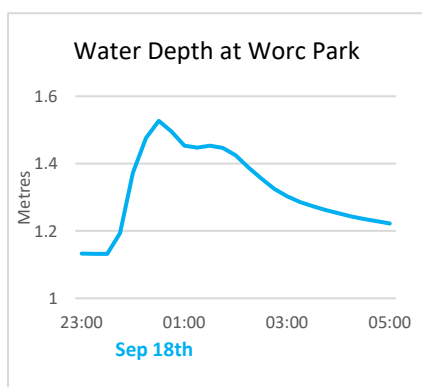
This newsletter looks at what is happening to the natural world along the Hogsmill, including the problems it faces and volunteer activities to monitor and restore its habitat, working with the South East Rivers Trust (SERT) and other local groups and alongside the Environment Agency (EA) and local water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

The Hogsmill in September

It's been a month of two halves for weather, but throughout groundwater in the aquifer feeding the Hogsmill has continued falling and the Ewell springs now appear to have dried up completely. With the early warm dry spell, much of the river looked lethargic, but this changed dramatically with two major storms that produced sudden "midnight surges" raising its depth by almost half a metre. These dispersed quickly and within a few hours the level was almost back to normal, though the storms have left a more vibrant river.



Berrylands Sep 15th



Sheephouse Way Sep 21st

The Species Recovery Grant will be targeted on restoring populations of water vole, eel and trout, species that were once common along the Hogsmill but have now largely or entirely disappeared. The grant of almost £400k will fund a second release of water voles and major habitat improvements, including new projects focused on the instream habitat and completing the two major projects in the pipeline: Chamber Mead wetlands and Enriching Elmbridge Meadows. Both have progressed this month.

Chamber Mead has been transformed since the start of the month as "heavy gear" has removed large amounts of surface soil and made good progress in excavations so the shapes of the new wetland ponds are already clear. In Elmbridge Meadows, Lower Mole Project volunteers spent 3 days braving the heat using more traditional methods to clear scrub in the area where a new backwater is planned.



Chamber Mead (Photo thanks to Robin)

Elmbridge Meadows

On pollution, the storms triggered sewage discharges at all 4 of the Combined Sewer Overflows on the Hogsmill; 3 of them spilled after both storms. Most were short lived, but one at the Hogsmill STW lasted for 7 hours. There were new signs of pollution at an “occasional” polluting outfall - Middle Mill - whilst other “regulars” were polluting much as normal. But TW has begun a new investigation into one of the most persistent polluting outfalls - on the south side of the A3 - so hopefully there’ll soon be improvement there.



Middle Mill

Portland Road

Malden Way South

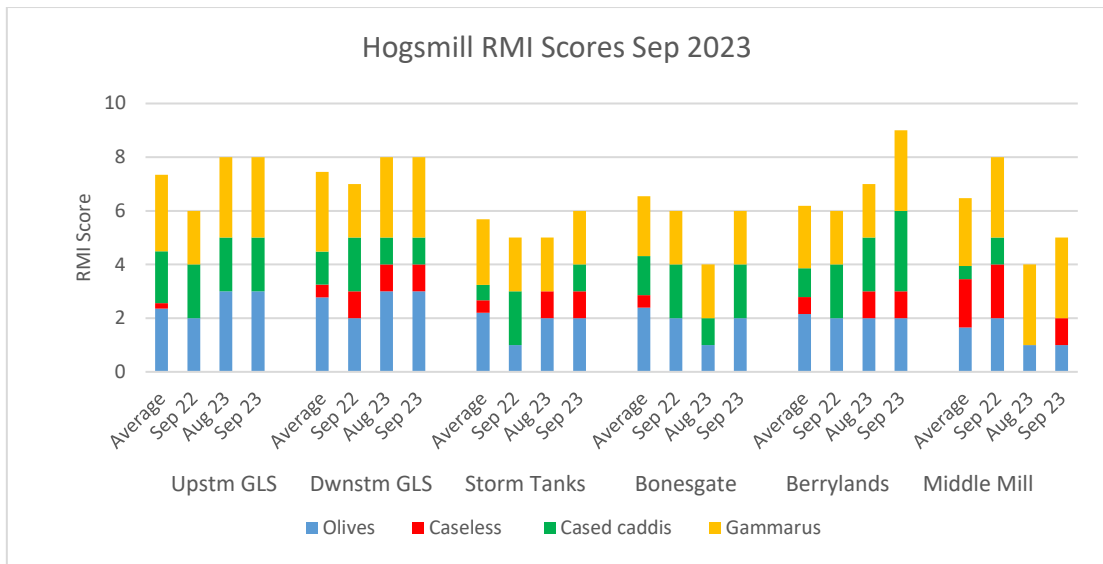
If you see pollution in the river or indications of possible pollution, such as dying fish, please call the EA Hotline: 0800 80 70 60, and ideally take a photo. You can also contact Thames Water on: 0800 316 9800 (option 2) or on twitter: [@thameswater](https://twitter.com/thameswater).

Hogsmill RMI in September

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. Each site has a “trigger” below which scores could indicate problems and these are reported to EA for follow-up action

The 6 main-river sites were surveyed between September 8th and 23rd, both before and after the storms. Scores rose from August at 4 sites, but the trays lacked life and the total count was the lowest of the year:

- The best score this month was the “9” at Berrylands driven in large part by a massive rise to over 200 cased caddis. There’ve been a couple of previous occasions when there’s been a similar jump only for it to be reversed the next month so this rise may also be short-lived. As the sample was taken before the storms it is unlikely that the caddis were just swept down from further up the river;



- Both sites with breaches of the trigger score last month avoided a repeat, though concerns remain. For Middle Mill, this was only thanks to a single caseless caddis and sampling conditions were much better than last time. For Bonesgate, it was largely the result of a large jump in cased caddis numbers, which might not be sustained, with other counts still low. The improved score at Ewell Storm Tanks was also the result of a few cased caddis being found;
- The scores at both sites by the Green Lanes Stream were the same as last month and counts were fairly similar too. These were surveyed after the storms and the 2 spills at the Epsom Storm Tanks so there were no obvious signs that these had an impact;
- On the individual species, the low overall count was mainly the result of olive and gammarus numbers being well below average at most sites. But it was a good month for the “march of the mini-caddis”, with large numbers of tiny but active caddis, and for “dancing demoiselles”, though fish numbers were low: perhaps there’s a reason for this...



“Can I help count the bullheads please? “