



## The Hogsmill in December 2023



It's been damp and dreary along the river for much of the month, but Hogsmillers are hardy folk and they've still been out in force undertaking improvement work as well as continuing our regular monitoring.



There've been a few late splashes of colour, but it's mainly been atmospheric misty scenes along the river, though with leaves mostly gone it's been a good time to appreciate the sculpture of the bankside trees;



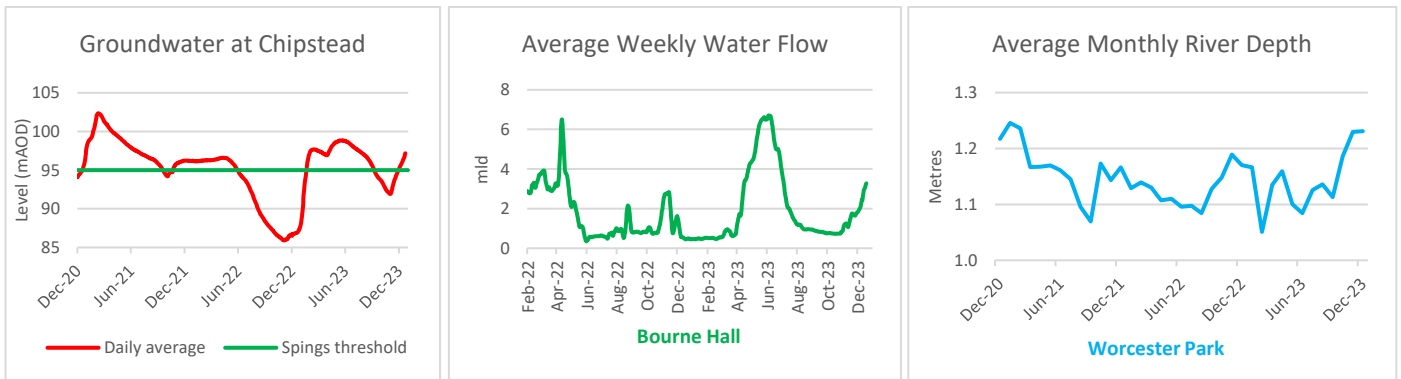
and the magnificent birds, large and small, always look splendid whatever the conditions.



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 December

With more heavy rain this month, the annual total for the catchment is likely to be around 900mm, the highest since 2014. Groundwater has continued to rise and the flow from the springs has increased though it is still well short of that in the early summer. But with surrounding land saturated, surface water has rapidly flowed into the river so the level and flow have continued to be unusually high all along the Hogsmill. It has also again been very mucky, with the Bonesgate contributing plenty of brown water and build-ups of “natural scum” around the several trees that have fallen into the river from the sodden banks.



Tolworth Court Farm



Bonesgate confluence



Sheephouse Way



Elmbridge Meadows

It's been a busy month for volunteer restoration work. The “Moles” removed scrub threatening to swamp one of our best wildlife meadows in the Southwood Nature Reserve. They also cleared overhanging vegetation in Hogsmill Wood, a small but neglected Nature Reserve by the A3 with potential to be a haven for wildlife: a survey summer identified 76 different species there. Citizen Zoo volunteers continued work to protect water vole habitat by extending the dead hedge by the river in Rose Walk Nature Reserve.



Southwood Nature Reserve



Hogsmill Wood



Rose Walk Nature Reserve

The Chamber Mead wetlands have largely been completed and the Green Lanes Stream is now flowing along its new course with a new bridge in place to enable access to the stepping stones. Some tidying up of the site will be done in early January and the wetlands will be planted up next Spring. Attention will then switch to the Enriching Elmbridge Meadows project; SERT will be talking about this at the first meeting of the revived Kingston Biodiversity Network at 7pm on January 24<sup>th</sup> at Kingston University.



New "backwater"  
(Photo thanks to Robb)



Chamber Mead bridge



New Confluence



Enriching Elmbridge Meadows

The Catchment Partnership, which brings together organisations – SERT, EA, water companies, local councils, volunteer groups, etc. - working to improve the health of the river and its catchment, held its quarterly meeting this month. Points of note from the partner updates were:

- A new method for detecting wildlife by testing water samples for DNA in the river (eDNA) is being applied on the Hogsmill. Highlights of the first set of results from 4 locations are water vole DNA found by Green Lane Bridge in New Malden and brown trout detected in Kingston. Signs of a wide range of fish species were found all along the river, including dace, perch, gudgeon and eel;
- The Wild Tolworth project aims to create an improved more natural environment for wildlife in the large Tolworth Court Farm greenspace beside the Hogsmill. The first phase involved baseline surveys that showed the richness of the wildlife already there; for example nearly 1000 different species of invertebrates were identified, many rare. It also involved feasibility studies: one that looked at restoring wetlands has come up with an ambitious design for a series of ponds that mimic the original route of the Hogsmill. Funds are being sought to progress this in 2024;
- Thames Water(TW) plan to upgrade the storm tanks at the Hogsmill STW to reduce sewage spills into the river. Latest data show these totalling over 160 hours in 2023 and there have been further spills in December. This is more than double the *recorded* total for 2022, though neither figure adjusts for periods when the monitors were not working. The scheme is due for completion in 2026, later than originally planned because of capacity constraints and the scale/complexity of the project;
- TW's programme of detailed investigations into polluted outfalls (SWOP) includes about 25 along the Hogsmill in its present 5-year Plan, a large expansion on the previous period. This has so far identified

about 140 properties with misconnected appliances. Investigations into 15 outfalls have been completed or at the stage of rectifying problems found. There are 4 “live” projects on outfalls that have been investigated in the past, but where problems persist: Sheephouse Way, where further work is due to start in January; 2 outfalls by the A3; and Portland Road. There are 7 on the “waiting list”; one of which, Alexandra Rec on the Tolworth Brook, regularly shows signs of pollution.



Sheephouse Way



Malden Way South



Elmbridge Avenue



Portland Road



Alexandra Rec

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/report-a-problem](http://www.thameswater.co.uk/help/report-a-problem)

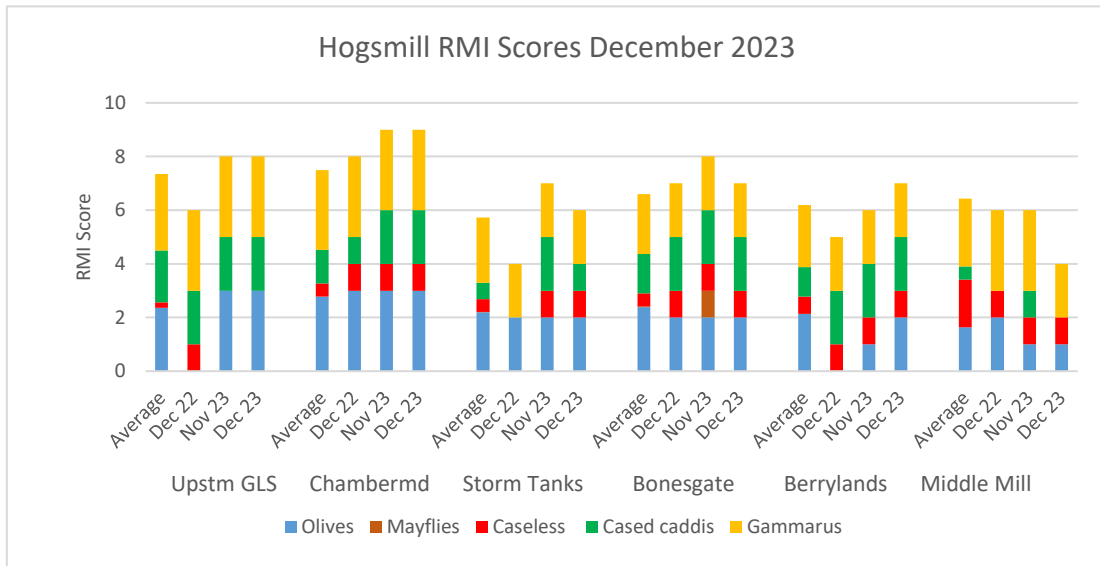
## Hogsmill RMI in December

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 usual main-river sites and the new one by the Ewell stepping stones were surveyed between December 14<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>, again in water that was above normal in depth though not as high as last month. Results were mostly similar to November, though we did have a “breach” that dragged down the overall average score:

- The below-trigger score of 4 was at Middle Mill and was largely driven by a big drop in gammarus numbers. Low scores are common here at this time of year, but there was a strong smell and other signs of pollution suggesting this was a major factor. As the nearby STW storm tanks had overflowed for 70 hours in the previous 2 months, including for 16 hours a day before the survey, this is not that surprising, though such discharges ought to be heavily diluted by the volume of treated effluent;
- The best results continue to be at the upstream end of the river where at both sites counts of both olives and gammarus continue in the 100s, quite a rarity now downstream. It seems too soon to attribute this to the recent return of flow through the springs, but the relatively short “dry springs” spell this year and the top-up from surface water have probably helped;

- At the mid-river sites, counts were almost always very close to November levels, though unfortunately no more mayflies at Bonesgate;
- The diversion of the Green Lanes Stream has changed conditions at the old downstream site – now better described as the “Chambermead site” - and at the new stepping stones site downstream of the new confluence. Over the past month work on the project has caused some disturbance at both, with periods of high flow and some silt. This hasn’t affected the scores, which were an impressive “9” at both sites in December as well as November, though counts were down somewhat this month. Obviously it’ll be some time before the beneficial impact of the diversion can be assessed.



A Happy Christmas and New Year to all Hogsmillers!