

The Hogsmill in March 2024

It's again been mainly gloomy and soggy, though with a calm balmy interlude mid-month. This led to a spell in which the Hogsmill looked pristine with clear water as well as a strong flow but it didn't last; and the surrounding land has remained saturated with areas that are still hard to navigate for man or beast.



Ewell



Berrylands (photo thanks to Phil)



Bonesgate Stream



Six Acre Meadow

The magic of spring has been on show with trees and bushes bursting into new life with spectacular buds and one of the Hogsmill highlights, blackthorn blossom, putting on a particularly good display this year.



Some butterflies have been spotted in the brief sunny spells and the distinctive sounds of summer visiting warblers have started to be heard, while our native birds have been busy collecting nesting material.

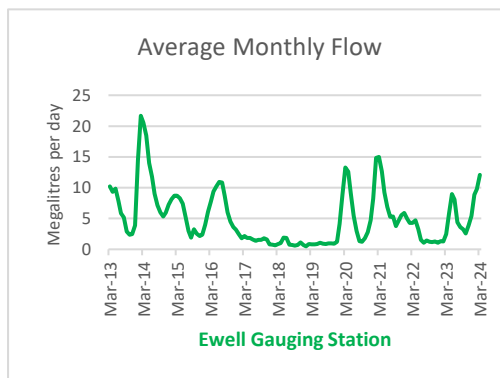
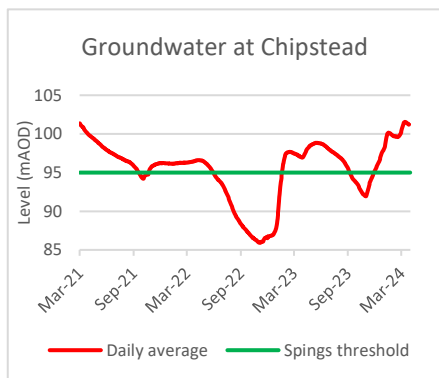


(Photo thanks to Pauline)

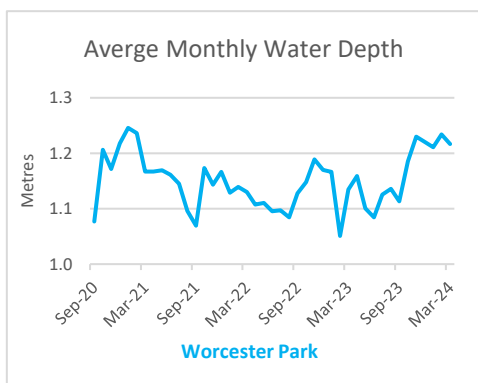
This newsletter looks at what is happening to the natural world along the Hogsmill, including the problems it faces and volunteer activities to monitor and restore its habitat, working with the South East Rivers Trust (SERT) and other local groups and alongside the Environment Agency (EA) and local water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

The Hogsmill in March

Buoyed by high winter rain – for the past 6 months about 1½ times the average – groundwater and flow through the springs have again risen this month. But to put this in context, both are well below early 2014 levels and just below those in 2020 and 2021; and the flow is perhaps only half the norm 150 years ago. Nonetheless a large amount of chalk-filtered water has still been gushing over the Ewell “falls” into the river.



Downstream a spell of clear healthy-looking water was sandwiched between what seems to have become almost the norm of surges of muddy water that followed early and late month storms.



March 12th



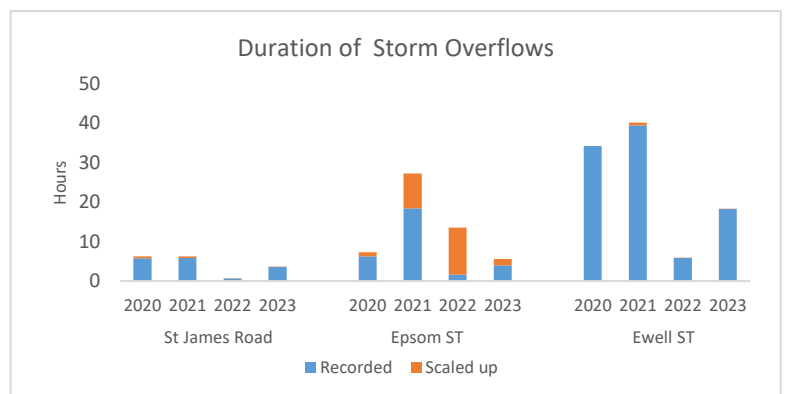
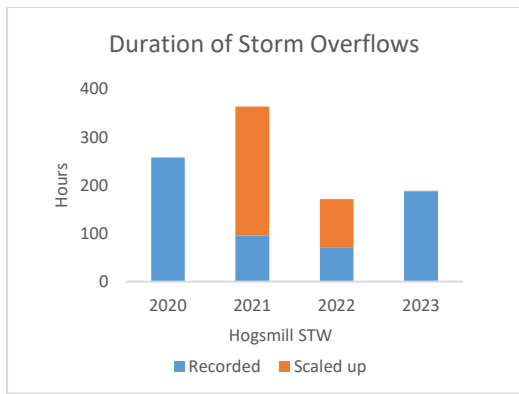
March 25th
Sheephouse Way



March 28th

These storms also triggered overflows from the Storm Tanks at the Hogsmill STW. Thames Water’s (TW) provisional data suggests that there have already been over 600 hours of spills this year there. A project to increase capacity of the Tanks has been included in its draft investment plans for the next 5-year period. But their latest work suggests extra capacity equivalent to about 14 Olympic sized swimming pools might be needed to tackle the problem, much more than so far planned, raising both cost and logistical issues.

According to new EA data the 4 Combined Sewer Overflows on the Hogsmill discharged for over 200 hours in 2023. This is over 2½ times the *recorded* level for 2022, but the monitors weren’t working for long periods then. Crudely scaling by the amount of time they were off-line suggests that the rise in 2023 was quite small and that on the same basis, discharges were much lower than in 2021 and 2022, both wet years. But if the high numbers so far this year are confirmed, the Hogsmill is set for a large increase in 2024.



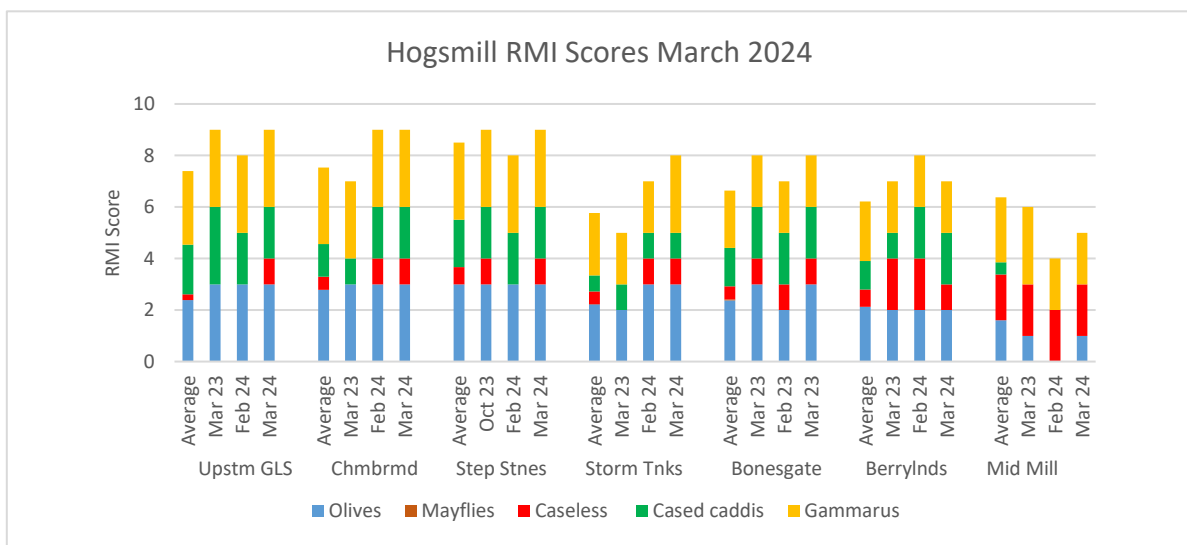
If you see pollution in the river or indications of possible pollution, such as dying fish, please call the EA Hotline: 0800 80 70 60, and ideally take a photo. You can also contact Thames Water on: 0800 316 9800 (option 2); on: www.thameswater.co.uk/help/water-and-waste-help/pollution or on: [@thameswater](https://twitter.com/thameswater).

Hogsmill RMI in March

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 7 main-river sites were surveyed between March 21st and 28th, all in clear, fast-flowing and deep water. These apparently good conditions were broadly confirmed by water quality tests undertaken at about the same time by Josh from EA that found high dissolved oxygen concentrations and low levels of ammonium nitrogen, an indicator of possible pollution, at most but not all points that were sampled.

Scores were mostly up from February’s and the average for the 6 “long-running” sites was the highest for almost 2 years, perhaps showing the benefits of a long period of good flows and levels of water. That said, some of the improvements again reflected small changes in counts:



- The one site with a lower score than February was Berrylands and while this was the result of a tiny drop in caddis numbers, generally the counts were rather mediocre. This is of note as the EA survey found a pocket of poor dissolved oxygen and ammonium nitrogen readings at the site. The reason is unclear: there is an outfall nearby that looks polluted but that is downstream and the outfall immediately by the site hasn't been showing visible signs of pollution for some time;
- A breach of the trigger was just avoided at Middle Mill this month, though this was a rather hollow victory as the total count was well down and the lowest for almost 5 years. EA's water sampling showed moderate but not high levels of ammonium nitrogen;
- All of the up and mid-stream sites had scores of "8" or "9", 1-2 points above the long-term average, and a contrast to the downstream sites, something that could reflect the effects of 4 months of good flows through the springs;
- The total number of individuals counted fell, though from quite a high level in February. The improved scores were driven by greater diversity with all 4 "usual" species being found at 6 of 7 sites. A feature of the last 6 months has been the relatively large contribution to scores from diversity rather than large counts; having a range of different species is a positive indicator of river health.

What's coming up on the Hogsmill?

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. Updates were provided on some exciting projects for the Hogsmill.

Work is progressing on removing remaining [obstacles to fish passage](#):

- Design and survey work is ongoing on the TW-led project to tackle the last major weir, that by [Kingsmeadow](#) stadium. Timing will depend on when conditions are judged most suitable for construction work and on the completion of detailed designs. But delivery looks likely to be in 2025;
- EA is investigating options to replace the old fish/eel pass at the [Middle Mill](#) weir that had to be removed last year. The lead option is a series of rock check weirs that will allow fish passage. The aim is to undertake the work this year, but it seems more likely to be in 2025;
- SERT has undertaken design and flood modelling work on a project to notch the concrete footing on the [Riverhill bridge](#) by the Toby Carvery. This will facilitate restoration work upstream and enable the current less-than-ideal fish pass downstream to be removed. The necessary permissions will soon be sought ahead of fundraising to enable delivery.

Over £½m in funding has been obtained to take forward the project to enhance the [Tolworth Court Farm](#) nature reserve. Comprehensive ecological surveys have been undertaken and a rewilding vision created. The focus will now be on restoring the historic wetlands by the Hogsmill and on more natural processes for management, including conservation grazing. Community engagement is a key part of the project and volunteers have already been active this month clearing up the site.

Working Groups have been looking at how best to take forward the project funded under TW’s Catchment Partnership Support scheme to understand better the [physical environment](#) and [water quality](#) issues on the Hogsmill and Beverley Brook. On water quality, options involving both “high-tech” and “simple” kits and different frequencies of testing are being explored, with first-hand experience being gained as to what some would involve. The aim is to have some testing alongside RMIs that can complement the results of our normal sampling. Opportunities for volunteers to take part in the testing will be advertised soon.

An Open Day to celebrate the completion of the [Chamber Mead wetlands](#) in Ewell is being held on Saturday A 20th April The official opening and ribbon cutting will take place from 11 a.m., which will be followed from 12:30 by various events and activities, including guided walks, wetland planting, nature trails and even a display of the weird and wonderful critters found in RMI sampling. All are welcome to come along.



The intrepid Tolworth Farm volunteers!



Testing sampling kits on the Beverley Brook



Chambermead wetlands