

The Hogsmill in May 2024

Frequent rain and some warm sun have made it a “grow-grow” May along the Hogsmill. The river banks have been smothered in green while in the surrounding areas the green has been enriched by the yellow and whites of buttercups, wild mustard and cow parsley and by other spring flowers.



Along the river, young families have been growing rapidly, though most are still at the “cute and fluffy” stage. As usual, survival rates have been mixed, with ducklings seeming to fare especially badly. Perhaps they need the warnings that some other birds seem to be providing beside the river!



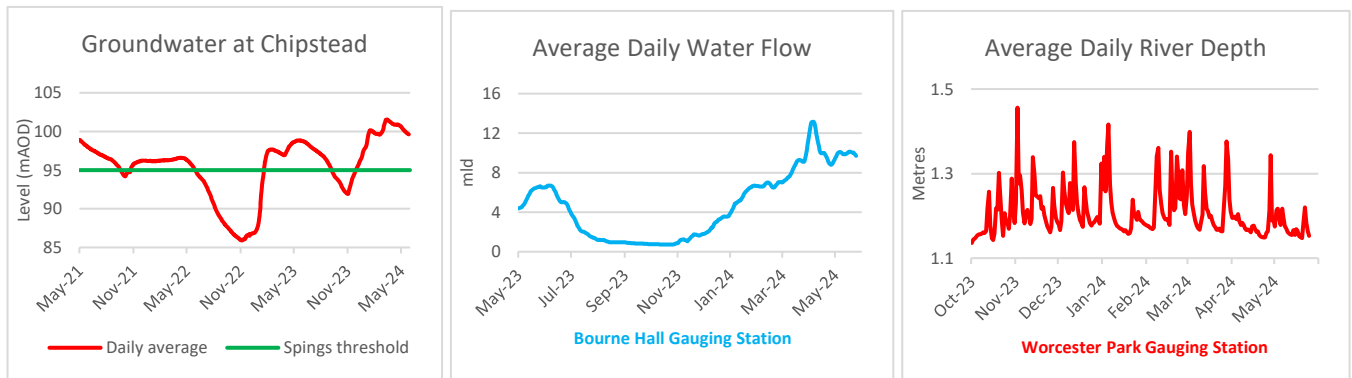
“Look out, predator about...”

“Lunch?....”

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 May

There's been slightly less rain this month, and groundwater has begun to fall. But while the flow from the springs has levelled off they are still sending about 10 mld of water from Bourne Hall Lake into the upper river. Downstream the water level has continued to be above normal, and with the rain being steady rather than in downpours there haven't been the large surges of muddy water seen in recent months. The result is that there's again been unusually clear water along much of the river, so much so that the fish have found it harder to remain hidden, though some of the monsters look too big for even the larger fisher predators!



Horse Pond

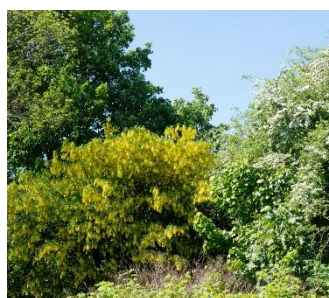


Bonesgate confluence



Old Malden (photo thanks to Pauline)

Beside the river, the meadows seem particularly lush this year while new vistas of the Chambermead wetlands have been opened up by the completion of the bridge and waterside path. Late-season blossom has been adorning riverside trees and wild flowers have been thriving, providing relief to all sorts of insects, many of which have been struggling in the variable weather conditions so far this year.





An unfortunate result of the good growing conditions is that Himalayan balsam has shot up further, invading new areas and nearing head-height in places. Our intrepid volunteers have already been busy “pulling” even in the rain, and more “bashes” are planned for June at which help would be welcome, including:



- Elmbridge Meadows on June 1st with the Kingston University Biodiversity Action Group: more details from biodiversity@kingston.ac.uk
- Six Acre Meadow on June 4th, 18th and 25th with the Kingston Ramblers: more details on: www.kingston-ramblers.org.uk;
- Bonesgate Confluence on June 13th and Toby Carvery on June 20th with the Epsom and Ewell Countryside team: more details from lcoomber@epsom-ewell.gov.uk;
- Elmbridge Meadows on June 23rd and Six Acre Meadow on June 25th with SERT: more information on: www.southeastriverstrust.org.uk;

SERT is also organising surveys of balsam and other invasive species on the Hogsmill, Beverley Brook and Wandle to help focus further counter-measures. A training session is being held at Raynes Park Library on June 4th: more information on: www.southeastriverstrust.org.uk

Other events planned for June on the Hogsmill include: a guided walk along the river by Elmbridge Meadows on June 10th and a Community River Day at Elmbridge Meadows on June 23rd with a range of activities for all ages, both being organised by SERT: details on www.southeastriverstrust.org.uk .

This year’s [London Rivers Week](http://www.thames21.org.uk) is from June 22nd to June 30th. As well as the events on the Hogsmill it includes a range of others that could be of interest to “Hogsmillers”: walks along other local rivers, many of which face similar issues to the Hogsmill; talks on topics such as water quality monitoring and water vole recovery; and many other activities. Details are on: www.thames21.org.uk .

There's been mixed news on [pollution](#) this month. On the positive side, there haven't been any recorded discharges from the combined sewer overflows on the Hogsmill; and 2 "ordinary" outfalls that for a considerable time have usually shown indications of pollution looked clear when checked.

But a large amount of pollution was found at and downstream of the Green Lane Bridge outfall in Berrylands. Thames Water came out quickly and installed a boom. The flow had stopped the next day and a week later ammoniacal nitrogen (AN), an indicator of pollution, was back to a low level. But it had been very high at the time of the spill, so an impact on wildlife was likely; some evidence was found in RMI results – see below. It is not yet known whether the source has been identified and is being rectified. This outfall had moderately high AN levels in EA tests in March and April so there looks to have been an ongoing issue for some time.



Portland Road



King Charles Road



Green Lane Bridge



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).

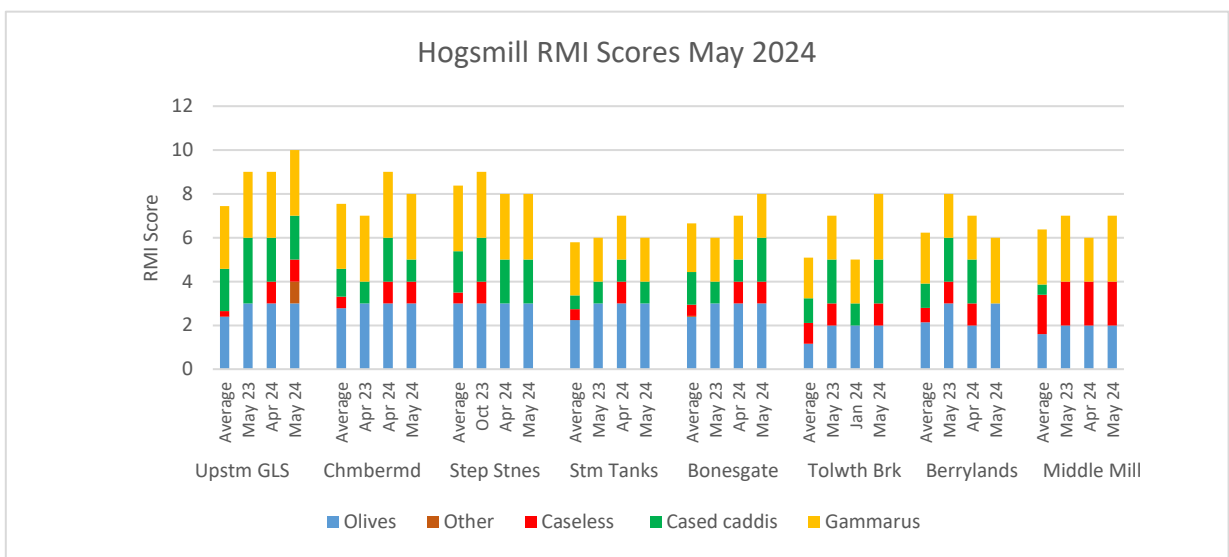
Hogsmill RMI in May

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" – "5" for those on the Hogsmill - below which scores could indicate problems and these are reported to EA

8 sites were surveyed between May 17th and 23rd , including that on the Tolworth Brook. The individual results were slightly more variable this month, but overall the good run seen so far this year was continued:

- The best score was the "10" at the upstream Green Lanes Stream site, boosted by a blue-winged olive, only the third time in over 700 surveys that one has been identified on the Hogsmill, and notable as they are less tolerant of poor water quality than the RMI species normally found;
- A score of "8" was achieved at the Tolworth Brook site with the trays full of life: as well as the usual RMI species there were water scorpion, water boatmen and needle bugs. Such a score is very good for a small stream, especially compared to the "4s" that were the norm when monitoring started in 2018, and probably partly reflects the major restoration works undertaken that year;

- At the other extreme, the score at Berrylands fell to a “6”. This is likely to be related to the pollution spill at the adjacent Green Lane outfall, which took place a week before the survey. While counts of olives and gammarus rose from April’s, relatively pollution-intolerant caddis were completely absent. The last time there was a zero count of caddis was in 2018, one month after a previous pollution spill, though as caddis counts are usually low here, neither represented a dramatic drop in numbers;
- Both the usual low-scoring sites, Middle Mill and Ewell Storm Tanks, had reasonable scores of “7” and “6”, perhaps partly reflecting a couple of months with relatively few storm tank overflows, while the remaining sites all scored “8”;
- The total count of RMI invertebrates rose slightly this month, but for the 6 long-running sites it was down by a third from May 2023 when olive and gammarus numbers were particularly high.



“You’re a funny looking olive?.....”



“I’m special, I have blue wings...”
(Photo thanks to Pamela)