

# The Hogsmill in April 2024

Quite a mix of conditions this month: March winds, April showers and even touches of summer warmth and winter chill. But thanks to the winter rain there's been an explosion of green along the Hogsmill corridor, with even the bare area around the new wetlands perking up, and it is already a good year for spring flowers.



Breeding season is under way though family life has reached a variety of stages. There's been everything from the wedding kiss and wedding night through to pestering toddlers and even gawky teens!

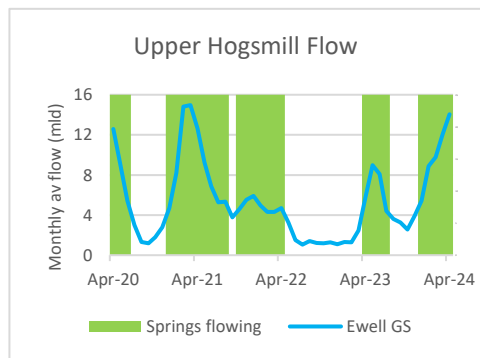


This newsletter looks at what is happening to the natural world along the Hogsmill, including the problems it faces and volunteer activities to monitor and restore its habitat, working with the South East Rivers Trust (SERT) and other local groups and alongside the Environment Agency (EA) and local water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

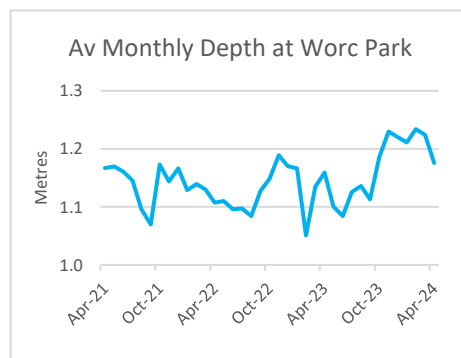


## The Hogsmill in April

The Ewell springs have continued to pump strongly, now for five months in a row, as groundwater has remained very high. The flow into the upper Hogsmill has risen further this month, sustaining the river downstream, where a drier interlude meant less water coming from the tributaries and surrounding ground. For much of the month, the river looked healthy with a good flow of clear water, but late downpours produced a surge of dirty water of the sort that have become familiar in recent months.



Bourne Hall springs



Bonesgate



Ewell



Berrylands (photo thanks to Phil)



Sheephouse Way

The highlight of the month was an Open Day at the [Chambermead wetlands](#) in Ewell, which also saw its official opening. This major project, conceived by the Catchment Partnership a decade ago and funded from a wide range of sources, will filter pollutants from the Green Lanes Stream so cleaner water reaches the main Hogsmill. It will also create new habitat that wildlife is already enjoying. Around 300 people attended the Open Day providing a great opportunity to educate the community about the Hogsmill. A start has been made on adding around 10,000 plants to the site. Volunteers would be welcome to help with this mammoth task; for details contact: [volunteering@southeastriverstrust.org](mailto:volunteering@southeastriverstrust.org)





As it's bird nesting time, other restoration work is largely on hold but survey work is continuing. This month Surbiton Bird Club's periodic monitoring of Tolworth Court Farm Fields identified 30 species, including 4 different birds of prey as well as plenty of everyday species, with parakeets being "top of the spots". But the bird of the month is probably the blackcap, with trees here and all along the Hogsmill echoing to its call.



This year's surveys of butterflies along the Hogsmill for the national Butterfly Monitoring Scheme also began this month. It's been a stuttering start, with the warm spell enticing many into flight only for the return to cold leaving them struggling, often seen stretched out on patches of mud trying to catch some warmth. But so far 9 species have been spotted along the Hogsmill transects.



The greenery along the Hogsmill looks great, but includes unwelcome "invaders". Stretches of the banks, especially in Malden and the Tolworth Brook, are already carpeted with Himalayan balsam so plenty of pulling is going to be needed. The Epsom and Ewell Conservation team have scheduled sessions on the stretch by the A240 on June 13<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> - contact Lindsay for more details: [lcoomber@epsom-ewell.gov.uk](mailto:lcoomber@epsom-ewell.gov.uk) - but look out for more "bashes". Japanese knotweed has appeared in the river by Kingston University - thanks to EA for investigating; while green algae is already rampant, especially downstream.



Elmbridge Meadows



Tolworth Brook



Middle Mill



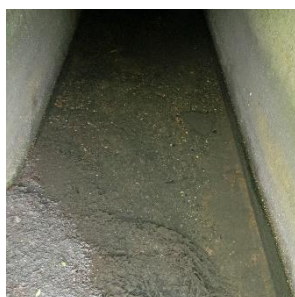
New data on outfall pollution has been obtained thanks to another visit from Josh of EA with a water quality probe. Testing focused on the New Malden stretch of the river containing 3 large outfalls with a history of pollution that have been subject to detailed (“SWOP”) investigations by Thames Water (TW). A range of measures were collected, but of particular interest is the findings on ammoniacal nitrogen (AN), an indicator of possible sewage pollution:



- High AN levels were found at the Malden Way and Green Lane Bridge outfalls. More investigatory work is planned at the former, which has a large catchment; while some misconnections have yet to be rectified at the latter, which could explain the reading. But notable at both is that there were no obvious *visible* signs of pollution, showing the limitations of our normal, but crude, checks;
- By contrast and surprising, the recorded level of AN at Surbiton Hill Park, where there are clear visible signs of pollution all around the outfall, was quite low;
- Slightly raised levels were found at the mouth of the Tolworth Brook, along which there are known to be some outfalls with signs of pollution, though these are some way upstream;
- Notable also is that the elevated levels were fairly localised, so it looks as if there is quite a large and rapid diluting effect from the flow of water down the main river.



Malden Way



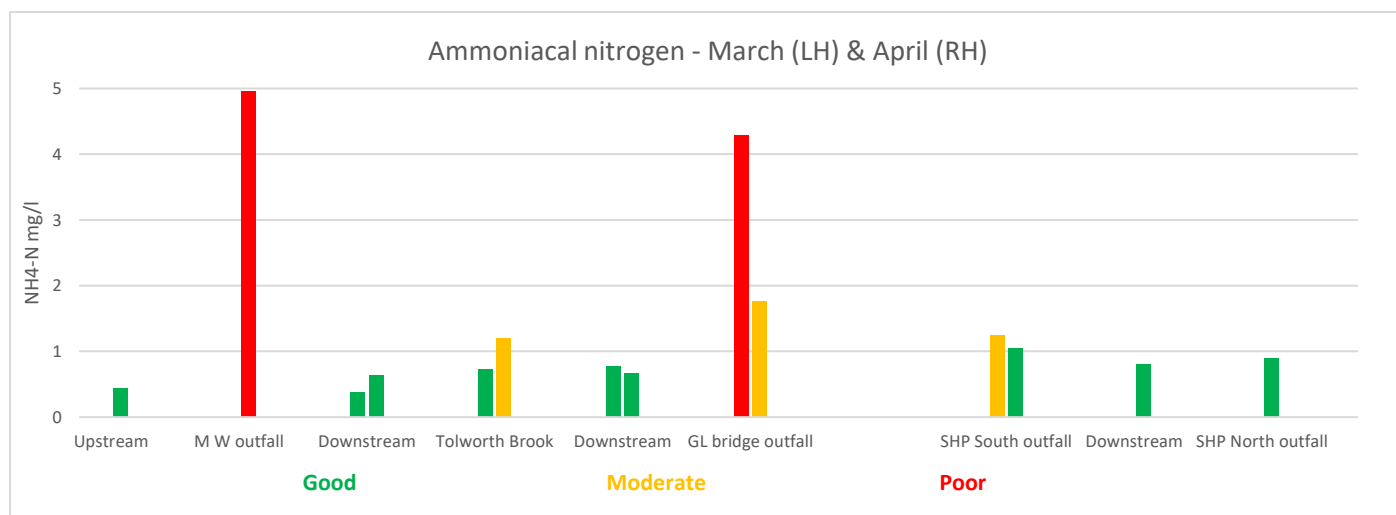
Green Lane Bridge



Surbiton Hill Park South



Surbiton Hill Park North





Drier conditions meant that discharges from the Storm Tanks were largely avoided this month, but a late spell of heavy rain was followed by a spill of almost 12 hours at the Hogsmill STW.

More positive news is that TW's new SWOP investigation into the heavily polluted Sheephouse Way outfall has already identified 49 misconnected appliances, 19 of which have been rectified. Although there are still signs of pollution, work is planned to continue until October so there is a good prospect of finding more misconnections and of a significant reduction in pollution.



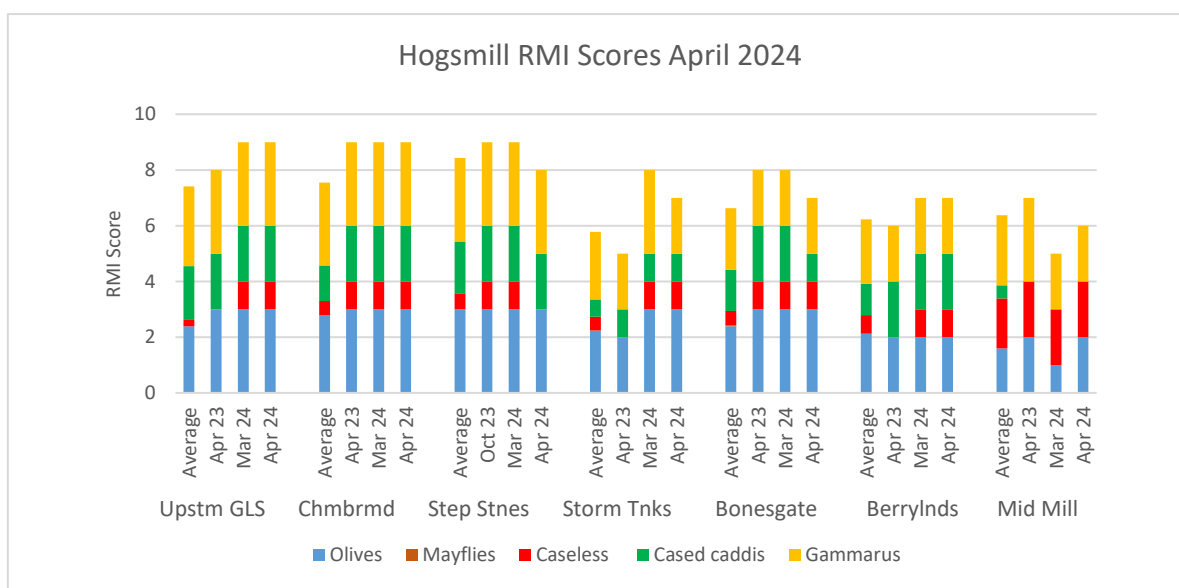
If you see pollution in the river or indications of possible pollution, such as dying fish, please call the EA Hotline: 0800 80 70 60, and ideally take a photo. You can also contact Thames Water on: 0800 316 9800 (option 2); on: [www.thameswater.co.uk/help/water-and-waste-help/pollution](http://www.thameswater.co.uk/help/water-and-waste-help/pollution)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

## Hogsmill RMI in April

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 April 18<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>, again in generally good water conditions, though there has been a marked rise in river weed at some sites since last month, which could affect where invertebrates choose to locate as well as making counting more difficult.

Overall the scores were broadly similar to March, continuing a good run of results so far this year:



- The highest scores were again at the upstream sites, probably buoyed by the strong flows of spring water; at all of them counts of both olives and gammarus have exceeded 100 every month this year;
- There was a curious similarity between the results at the 2 mid-stream sites - Ewell Storm Tanks and Bonesgate – that are normally rather different. This month both had extremely high olive counts but low numbers of all other species;
- The score at Berrylands was again a reasonable “7”, but the underlying counts remained mediocre compared to the upstream sites. The AN reading at the outfall by the site was better than last month but still only moderate so it is *possible* that there is some impact from pollution here;
- The score at Middle Mill was again up, but counts remained quite low. This is the site most affected by blanket weed making accurate counting especially hard, though it is unlikely that this could explain the very low number of gammarus, only just over 10 per cent of the average here;
- Amongst the species, there was a jump of over 60 per cent in olive numbers, but cased caddis counts fell, slightly surprising as this is about the time when they usually “come out to play” in large numbers.