



RINGWOOD NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

Sopley Circular Walk

Date: 17th March 2026
 Weather: Overcast to start clearing to sunny in the afternoon
 Walk Leaders : Judy Thomas and Christine Storey
 Attendees: 14

Sopley is a village and civil parish, it lies on the road from Christchurch to Ringwood, to the east of the River Avon. The parish covers an area from Thorney Hill to the parishes of Bransgore to the east and Burton to the south and includes the hamlets of Shirley, Avon and Ripley. Its situated in the fringe of the New Forest, just outside of the National Park. We left our cars at Sopley Village Hall car park and walked northwards along Priests Lane and passing farm land. We reached RAF Sopley Ground Controlled Interception (CGI) Radar Station (code named Starlight) site, developed in 1940 using an early radar surveillance system. Three different modifications were used during the war, it continued in use post war as a GCI, fighter interception and air traffic control radar unit until 1974. The only surviving surface features of the site are the guardhouse, which has been refurbished, the generator building and a small blockhouse that doubles as an emergency exit for the bunker. The bunker remains intact and is used by a private company for data storage. Nearby Sopley Camp was built in the early 1950s as a domestic site for the radar station and is best known as the initial home of the Vietnamese Boat People in 1979. The camp was sold in 1993 to a local partnership under the name Merryfield Park. Most of the old barracks site was redeveloped as housing. The 2-story building at the Sopley end has been converted into a museum/education centre by Friends Of New Forest Airfields (FONFA). The museum opened in May 2016. We continued walking through the hamlet of Ripley, stopping by Sopley Brook to have our lunch then returning back following the brook to the car park.

Flowering Plants	Birds	Fungi
Red Dead-nettle	Robin	King Alfred's Cakes
Lesser Celandine	Great Tit	Scarlet Elf-cup
Common Gorse	Rook	Honey Fungus Lace
Dandelion	Red Kite	Dung Roundhead
Cherry Plum	Black-headed Gull	
White Dead-nettle	Herring Gull	Insects
Wavy Bittercress	Kestrel	Brimstone Butterfly
Green Field Speedwell	Chaffinch	Peacock Butterfly
Daisy	Pheasant	Comma Butterfly
Cow Parsley	Greenfinch	Buff-tailed Bumble Bee
Greater Stitchwort	Starling	White-tailed Bumble-bee
Green Alkanet	Long-tailed Tit	Crane Fly sp.
Honesty	Pied Wagtail	
Lords and Ladies	Buzzard	Mammals
Bluebells	Chiffchaff	Rabbit
Common Mouse-ear	Song Thrush	
Cherry Laurel	Blue Tit	
Coltsfoot	Wren	
Greater Periwinkle	Jackdaw	

Broome	Blackbird	
Willow Catkins	Emu	
Sweet Violet	Red-legged Partridge	
(Chocolate Vine seen in garden at start of the walk)	Jay	
	Great-spotted Woodpecker	
	Wood Pigeon	
	Stock Dove	
	Blackcap	
	Nuthatch	



Cherry Plum by Gerry Traves



Peacock Butterfly by Gerry Traves