



## **RINGWOOD NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY**

### Sopley Walk

Date: 24<sup>th</sup> May 2023  
 Weather: Sunny and warm  
 Walk Leader: Sonia Wilkinson with the help of Maz and Will Russell  
 Attendees: 21

Sopley is a village and civil parish, it lies on the old main road from Christchurch to Ringwood, on the east bank of the River Avon. The parish covers an area from Thorney Hill to the parishes of Bransgore and Burton to the south and west respectively. The parish includes the hamlets of Shirley, Avon and Ripley. Sopley is 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, which was developed in 1940 using an early radar surveillance system. Three different modifications were used during the war and 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 had been redeveloped as housing, but 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 stream to the car park.

<b>Flowering Plants</b>	<b>Flowering Plants cont.</b>	<b>Birds</b>	<b>Butterflies</b>
Hawthorn	Honesty	Carrion Crow	Speckled Wood
Green Alkanet	Red Campion	Black-headed Gull	Holly Blue
Pink Sorrel	Thyme-leaved Speedwell	Rook	Orange Tip
Field Forget-me-not	Oriental Poppy	Wood Pigeon	Brimstone
Prickly Sow-thistle	Suffocated Clover	Chiffchaff	Green-veined White
Catsear	Wild Radish	Green Woodpecker	Large White
Daisy	Oil-seed Rape	Egyptian Geese	Red Admiral
Cut-leaved Cranesbill	Bugloss	Buzzard	<b>Dragonflies etc.</b>
Greater Celandine	Bittersweet	Swallow	Broad-bodied Chaser
Common Vetch	Rhododendron	Greenfinch	Scarce Chaser
Ribwort Plantain	Lesser Trefoil	Goldfinch	Common Blue Damselfly
Common Comfrey	Mexican Fleabane	Red Kite	Southern Damselfly
Hairy Bittercress	Common Mallow	Pied Wagtail	Large Red Damselfly
Cleavers	Shining Cranesbill		Common Hawker
Cow Parsley	Black Bryony		<b>Others</b>
Ox-eye Daisy	Ivy-leaved Toadflax		Rabbit
White Dead-nettle	Lesser Celandine		Pond Skater
Red Dead-nettle	Smooth Hawksbeard		
Caper Spurge	Wood Speedwell		

Herb Bennet			
Wood Dock	<b>Grasses etc</b>		
Germander Speedwell	Tall Fescue		
White Bryony	Red Fescue		
Foxglove	Perennial Ryegrass		
English Bluebell	Annual Meadow-grass		
Dog Rose	Rough Meadow-grass		
Greater Stitchwort	Smooth Meadow-grass		
Ground Ivy	Wood Meadow-grass		
Stinging Nettle	Cocksfoot		
Hogweed	Barren Brome		
Hemlock Water Dropwort	Soft Brome		
Common Mouse-ear	Meadow Brome		
Red Clover	Bread Wheat		
Hedge Mustard	False Oat-grass		
Bulbous Buttercup	Sweet Vernal Grass		
Common Poppy	Yorkshire Fog		
Rough Hawkbit	Creeping Bent		
	Meadow Foxtail		



*Ox-eye Daisy growing in a front garden at Sopley by Gerry Traves*