

Swallowfield Stroll

A lovely village, butterfly nature reserve, farms and riverside.

This lovely walk starts in the village at the free car park at the Parish Hall (RG7 1QW). In summer, the village has House Martins, Swifts and Swallows nesting there.

Cross the road to the war memorial and turn right past the Wisteria covered cottage into The Street. Take the first left into Curly's Way and follow this keeping right until you find across the grass, the sign for Swallowfield Nature Reserve. This tiny patch of land with ditches and seasonal ponds has been known to hold Water Vole but is managed mainly for butterflies in summer and is worth an investigation for flowers and insects.

Exit the reserve to the right into the housing estate and turn left then bending right until you reach Trowe's Lane. Follow this quiet lane for a few hundred yards past a nice patch of young woodland with many birds and open fields.

Just after the junction with Charlton Lane follow the footpath sign on the left and then right at the sign. This wooded path has a field on the right growing crops and on my last walk it had the delightful smell of chives growing there. You pass a remarkable tree on the left that grown around two wires of the fence so it looks like they were fed through it! Soon the path opens a little and has sloes and wildflowers in summer and an impressive tidy plot of allotments on the left.

Emerging onto Part Lane cross the stile opposite slightly to the right, into the field. Usually with arable crops, this field will often have swallows, swifts and house martins feeding over it. Later in the year the Crow family takeover and Jackdaws can be heard and seen in noisy groups. As you near the hedge watch out for Yellowhammers singing "little bit of bread and no cheese". This bird is not common in the Blackwater Valley but they can be found here. Cuckoos are heard in spring and Red Kites and Buzzards are usually in the sky.

Climb the stile and follow the obvious path across the next field, looking left there is an old willow tree that has housed Little Owl in the past and looking right often geese will be seen in the meadow, particularly in winter months. Another stile gives you a lovely view of the river Blackwater on both sides. Along the box hedged path you soon get another view of a diverted section of the river where you might see a flash of, or a perched, Kingfisher.

Next cross the road carefully to the left and pass the house into the car park (closed in July 2020) for All Saints Church. This area has had Spotted Flycatcher and Tawny Owl in the past. Enjoy the church and its old graveyard before continuing the path from the other end of the car park. This is a permissive path by the river courtesy of Swallowfield Park.

On the left soon after you can see the weir; Grey Wagtails like this place. Continuing along the fenced path you'll see a Barn Owl box on the right and the traditional parkland where cattle often graze. Soon you see the lovely old bridge that you cross to the left.

Follow the road and then take the path across the grass to the right of the gatehouse. Turn right at the road and you are back to the start.