

## Nature note:

*No one steps into the same river twice*, said the Greek philosopher Heraclitus, meaning that the water flowing by in the river today is not the same as yesterday's, and tomorrow's will be different again. Change is the only constant. He could as well have said *No one steps on the same beach twice in Shingle Street*. Every day is a little different and over time the changes have been dramatic. We've been doing surveys of the vegetation on the shingle banks here for several years now to try and record these changes and see what lessons we can learn about the preservation of these fragile plant communities. Shingle banks like ours are a rarity in Europe and they host a number of very specialised flowering plants that are adapted to this harsh and shifting environment.

This year a crack team of residents again surveyed the whole stretch of shingle from the Battery to the Beacons (sounds like the title of a BBC documentary!). We did indeed observe several changes. The sea kale this year has been very abundant and was a magnificent spectacle, stretching all the way from Shingle

Jeremy Mynott



*A wonderful view of the flora*

Street to East Lane, Bawdsey, like a forest of huge cauliflowers sprouting unexpectedly from a desert of stones. Along with Dungeness, we now have one of the largest colonies of this striking plant anywhere in Britain, but I gather from some older residents that it's quite a recent colonist here. The sea pea has spread too and there are huge drifts of it in new areas across the shingle. The clusters of its purple flowers fade to blue later and are then succeeded by succulent seed pods, which are said to have once staved off starvation on the Suffolk coast in the seventeenth century during a famine (but they can cause paralysis if eaten in quantity, just in case you were thinking of trying some). Scattered amongst these are individual representatives of other shingle specialists like orache (much scarcer this year), sea beet, curly dock and the beautiful yellow-horned poppies (regarded as a weed in North America, curiously, but maybe that's because they contain dangerous hallucinogens).

The most striking change, however, is in the expansion of the grasses that now cover much of the central band of shingle between the shoreline and the houses. That is evidence that the banks have accreted depositions of soil and have to that degree stabilised. This comes with the further benefit that we now have skylarks singing over the shingle for the first time, exploiting the new grassland habitat that has emerged. Shingle Street has always been blessed with its larks and we now have a full exaltation.

**Jeremy Mynott** Shingle Street