SM12
Rayed *Aster tripolium* on salt-marshes

Stands dominated by rayed *Aster tripolium* have been encountered in situations with some freshwater influence such as brackish ditches behind sea walls where *Spartina anglica* and *Puccinellia maritima* are frequent associates. Beeftink (1962, 1965) has described similar vegetation from sites with local freshwater flushing as a distinct *Aster tripolium* sociatie. Rayed *A. tripolium* is also abundant on periodically-flooded saline muds in inland salt-marshes with *Spergularia marina* and *Puccinellia distans* (see the *Puccinellietum distantis astereto-sum* of Lee 1977; also Edees 1972).

Although some floras note a certain habitat distinction between rayed forms of *A. tripolium* and the var. *discoideus* (e.g. Petch & Swann 1968, Jermyn 1974, Gibbons 1975), the situation is far from simple. The var. *discoideus* can also occur in brackish habitats and Jermy & Crabbe (1978) have recorded vegetation rich in dwarf rayed *A. tripolium* and *Suaeda maritima* from Salen Marsh, Mull, where there is little freshwater influence (cf. the intertidal *Suaedeto maritimae-Asteretum tripolii* Hocquette & Géhu 1965 in Ghestem 1972). Furthermore, even within the rayed form there appears to be a complex of genetically determined variation adapted to different environmental conditions (Gray 1971, 1974; Gray *et al.* 1979). Further sampling is needed to establish the ecological implications of this variation and to check the validity of erecting separate communities for the different forms.