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Ephemeral salt-marsh vegetation with *Sagina maritima*

Saginion maritimae Westhoff, van Leeuwen & Adriani 1962

Small stands of ephemeral vegetation with an often open cover of annuals and short-lived perennials occur patchily on British salt-marshes. Recurrent assemblages are rare and there seems to be a large element of chance in the floristic composition, early arrivals frequently pre-empting the niche. Such vegetation may include *Sagina maritima*, *S. nodosa* and *Plantago coronopus*, more rarely *Bupleurum tenuissimum* (to the south-east) and *Centaureum littorale* (to the north) and provide a salt-marsh context for ephemerals such as *Cochlearia danica* and *Desmazeria marina* which also occur in other maritime habitats.

Breaks in the turf of mid- and upper-marsh communities provide the most usual habitat for such species and they are especially characteristic of old turf-cuttings where they form part of the sequence of recolonising vegetation giving way to mixtures of *Festuca rubra*, *Agrostis*

stolonifera, *Puccinellia maritima* and *Potentilla anserina*, which come to approximate to the *Puccinellietum maritimae*, the *Juncetum gerardi* or the *Festuca-Agrostis-Potentilla* mesotrophic grassland. Such ephemerals also occur in disturbed situations around reclamation banks (e.g. Gray 1977, 1979, Adam & Akeroyd 1978).

This kind of vegetation is the nearest equivalent in Britain to similarly diverse assemblages on Continental salt-marshes which have been assigned to the Saginion alliance in the *Saginetea maritimae* Westhoff, van Leeuwen & Adriani 1962 (e.g. Beeftink 1962, 1965, 1975, 1977a; Tüxen & Westhoff 1963; Westhodd & den Held 1969). There, too, the vegetation is characteristic of upper-marsh situations, being especially associated with salt-marsh/sand-dune transitions where there is a contact between more and less maritime sediments of low soil moisture content but fluctuating salinity.