

SM4

Spartina maritima salt-marsh community *Spartinetum maritimae* (Emb. & Regn. 1926) Corillion 1953

Spartina maritima is a native species which seems to have reached a peak of abundance in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when it grew in every harbour between Beaulieu in Hampshire to Chichester in Sussex and plentifully along the coasts of Kent, Essex and south Suffolk and around The Wash (Marchant & Goodman 1969a). It declined rapidly thereafter and now survives often as isolated clumps around The Solent and on the north Isle of Wight coast (Marchant & Goodman 1969a) though extensive stands remain in parts of Essex (Jermyn 1974, Boorman & Ranwell 1977). The population at Scolt Head Island in Norfolk (Deighton & Clapham 1925, Chapman 1934) is now extinct.

S. maritima grows as clumps of stiff shoots and at Wittering in Sussex it has some *Spartina anglica* and a little *Arthrocnemum perenne*, *Puccinellia maritima*, *Suaeda maritima* and *Salicornia* agg. (Géhu & Delzenne 1975). It is a pioneer community throughout its European range which runs south from The Netherlands to Portugal (Beefink & Géhu 1973). The cause of its demise in Britain is not fully understood. It may partly be due to competition with *S. anglica*: Some former *S. maritima* sites are now occupied by *S. anglica* and the former seems to survive best where the latter is least aggressive, on drier sites above mean high water of spring tides (Marchant & Goodman 1969a). However, *S. maritima* is at the northern limit of its range in Britain and small climatic fluctuations may have played a part in its reduction (Marchant 1967). Certainly, little viable seed is produced at the present time (Marchant & Goodman 1969a).

