



# Do you know?

## Saltmarsh - is the best natural sea defence

### The Ecologist's Story



**What is saltmarsh?** Saltmarsh is an important coastal and estuary habitat. It forms a natural flood defence through the texture of its vegetation by absorbing wave and tidal energy. It is one of the many and varied benefits that humans freely gain from the natural environment. These benefits are called **ecosystem services**. Saltmarsh also provides fish nurseries and naturally stores carbon. Removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere is called **carbon sequestration**. Wave and tidal energy is absorbed through the saltmarsh channels and plant cover systems, encouraging sedimentation which reduces loss through erosion and acts to create a system in balance.

### How does Saltmarsh form?

**TIDE SLOWS** - sediment carried in on the tide drops out and pioneer plants such as Cord Grass and Samphire begin to grow on the mudflats.

**LOW MARSH** - in time these plants trap more sediment which encourages other plants including Common Scurvy Grass and Sea Aster.

**MIDDLE MARSH** - is subject to shorter tidal coverage and encourages more familiar plants such as Sea Lavender and Sea Purslane.

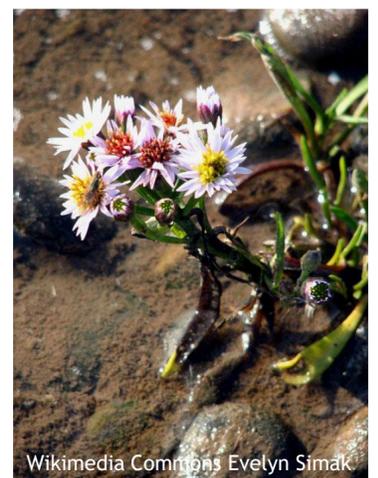
**UPPER MARSH** - a transitional stage in the saltmarsh development or “succession” when it is only covered by spring tides. This is where Common Reed, Sea Couch and Marsh Mallow are likely to be found.

### Building resilience

Saltmarsh is a vital asset for flood defence, relieving our flood defence walls from the direct impact of surge tides and storm driven waves. In the past it was acceptable practice to enwall and reclaim saltmarsh for agricultural usage. More recently efforts have been undertaken to maintain and stabilise our remaining saltmarsh systems through the use of polders to encourage sediment to settle or building them up by using dredging spoil.



Samphire



Sea Aster



Sea Lavender



Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB

Work being carried out at Falkenham Saltmarsh