1330 Atlantic salt meadows (*Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritimae*)

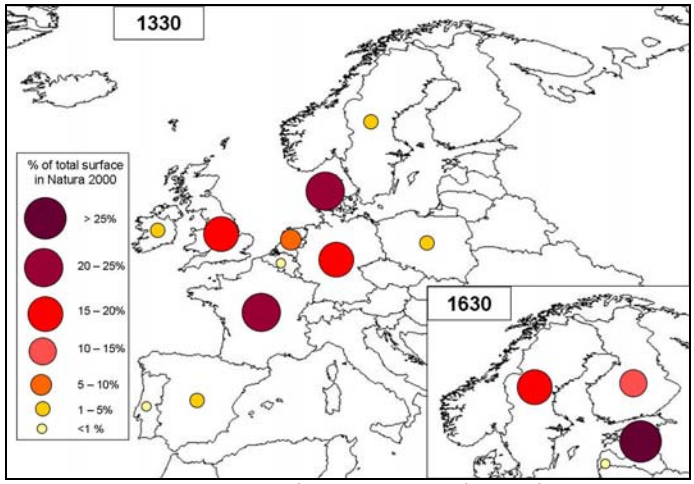
Management of Natura 2000 habitats. Summary

A typical Atlantic ungrazed/lightly grazed salt meadow with Limonium spp. South Walney Island, north-west England. Photo: Dr J. P. Doody

Atlantic salt meadows (1330) are communities of herbaceous halophytic (salt-tolerant) plants growing on the margins of tidally inundated shores. Atlantic salt meadows lie at the upper end of a succession between the early colonising species such as *Salicornia europaea* and transitions to vegetation where tidal influence is limited. Colonisation begins at Mean High Water of Neap tides extending to the upper limit of normal tides. Distributed along the eastern shores of the Atlantic and along the Baltic, there is a marked north-south variation in the plant community of salt marshes and coastal meadows. The main features that separate the *Baltic coastal meadows (1630) from the Atlantic salt marshes are their lower salinity levels and the very limited impact of the tide but, otherwise, many of the management recommendations are relevant to both habitat types. Management issues can be considered in two key categories associated with the:

1. Nature of the vegetation in relation to grazing management. The level of grazing pressure has a profound impact on the nature of the vegetation. These range from short, species-poor swards associated with heavily, often sheep-grazed salt marshes to lightly or historically ungrazed ones. The former may support large numbers of wintering herbivorous ducks and geese, and are preferred breeding sites for several species of wader birds. The latter, more structurally diverse swards have a higher diversity of plants and associated animals (especially invertebrates). They also provide habitat for passerines and other birds requiring nesting cover. A key question for the manager is whether to graze or not and if so the extent, number and type of animals, and period of grazing.
2. The physical structure of the habitat: notably whether it is eroding of accreting. This issue essentially concerns Atlantic salt marshes, which are highly influenced by tidal pressure and sea level rise. Boreal Baltic coastal meadows are, on the other hand, located in a region of Europe with isostatic land upheaval and micro tidal ranges. This means that problems related to erosion and 'salt marsh squeeze' are less pronounced for the sites along the Baltic Sea compared to those in the Atlantic.

There are many techniques to promote salt marsh accretion. Notable amongst these is planting of various species of native and non-native *Spartina*. Physical structures (polders) built to seaward of existing salt marsh helped to promote accretion as well as protecting the embankments enclosing created land. Other methods designed to 'hold the sea defence line' include sediment recharge of the beach. In areas where this is uneconomic, managing a realignment of the coast to re-create salt marsh is an alternative option. These and other similar activities take place, especially where relative sea levels are rising or where there is a depleted sediment budget.



Percentage distribution of the total surface of Atlantic salt meadows and Boreal Baltic coastal meadows in Natura 2000

The complete text of the document is available at:
http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/management/best_practice_en.htm

Management of Natura 2000 habitats is a project launched by the European Commission in January 2007 aimed at defining best practices for management of habitat types included in Annex I of the Habitat Directive (92/43/EEC) that need active recurring management. Twenty six habitat types that are representative of different bio-geographical regions have been considered.