

The Story of *Spartina*



The common names for *Spartina* are Cord Grass or Rice Grass. It is a salt tolerant grass (halophyte) and one of the first plants to grow when new saltmarsh is established. Up until 1829 the only species of *Spartina* in Europe was called *Spartina maritima*. The species *Spartina alternifolia* then arrived from North America, probably in the ballast of ships, and was first found growing on the Hythe mudflats in Southampton Water. It quickly spread and became naturalised. *Spartina maritima* and *Spartina alterniflora* crossbred to produce a sterile hybrid, *Spartina townsendii* and a fertile hybrid *Spartina anglica*.

Spartina spreads by sending out fast-growing rhizomes. Its roots bind mud and sediment into a dense mat. This is why saltmarsh has the appearance of being like a platform above the mudflats. Where *Spartina* dominates a saltmarsh, it will also be criss crossed by deep drainage creeks.



Saltmarsh in the Bosham Channel



Thorney Island Saltmarsh

In parts of Chichester Harbour the *Spartina* is beginning to die back. The reason for this is not clear, but it is thought that this may be due to the plant successfully completing its natural lifecycle of growth.