Irish Vegetation Classification (IVC)

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Community Synopsis

Scientific name	*Elytrigia repens* coarse grassland
Common name	Common Couch coarse grassland
Community code	SM7A

Vegetation

A sward of the tall, coarse grass *Elytrigia repens* dominates this low diversity community. Mixed into this is usually some small amount of *Agrostis stolonifera* and less frequently some *Festuca rubra* or *Holcus lanatus*. Occasionally there will be some scattered growth of *Atriplex prostrata*. Other halophiles, such as *Beta vulgaris*, *Aster tripolium*, *Triglochin maritimum* or *Juncus gerardii*, may also occur. Bryophytes are usually absent.

Ecology

This sward is to be found on fertile, base-rich soils at the very top of saltmarshes, where it occurs along driftlines and on the lower sections of levees. It also occurs inland in disused gardens, uncut verges and abandoned farmland.

Sub-communities

Two sub-communities are described. The *Atriplex prostrata* sub-community (SM7Ai) represents coastal swards whilst the *Holcus lanatus – Potentilla anserina* sub-community (SM7Aii) represents inland swards.

Similar communities

Elytrigia repens also occurs in the SM7B *Elytrigia atherica* saltmarsh but does not dominate; SM7B may co-occur with SM7A but forms slightly lower in the tidal frame.

Records and distribution

Number of records (all)

Clearly assigned:	56
Transitional:	3
Total:	59

Number of records (mapped)

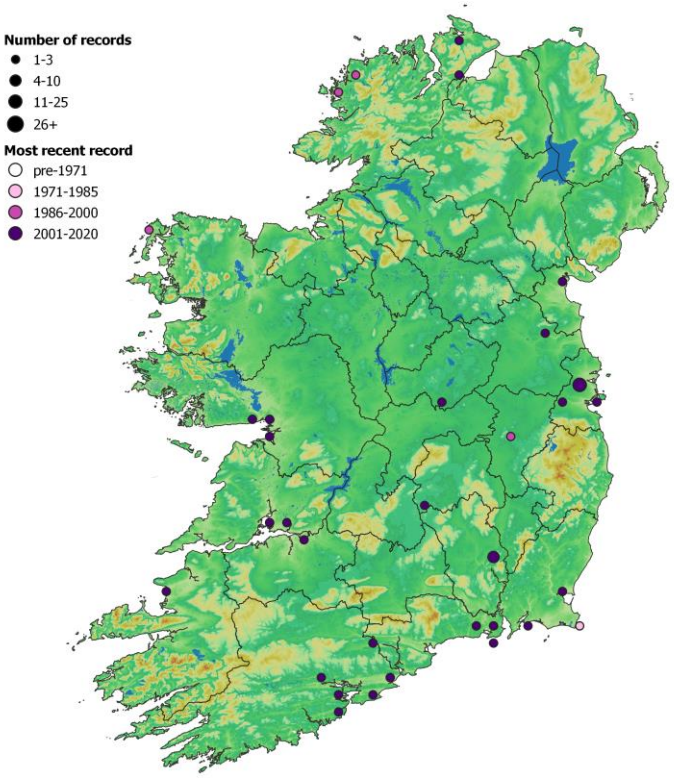
2001-2020:	53
1986-2000:	4
1971-1985:	1
Pre-1971:	0
Total:	58

Number of hectads (by most recent time period)

2001-2020:	29
1986-2000:	4
1971-1985	1
Pre-1971:	0
Total:	34

Number of hectads (records in each time period)

2001-2020:	29
1986-2000:	4
1971-1985	1
Pre-1971:	0



Synoptic table (n = 54)					
Species	**Frequency (from I-V)**	**Cover min (med) max**	**Species**	**Frequency (from I-V)**	**Cover min (med) max**
Elytrigia repens	V	4-(8)-10	*Sonchus arvensis*	I	3-(3)-4
Agrostis stolonifera	IV	1-(3)-7	*Stachys palustris*	I	3-(3)-3
Festuca rubra	III	2-(3)-8	*Calystegia sepium*	I	1-(1)-1
Holcus lanatus	II	2-(3)-4	*Chenopodium album*	I	5-(5)-6
Atriplex prostrata	II	1-(4)-7	*Convolvulus arvensis*	I	3-(3)-3
Picea sitchensis	I	3-(4)-5	*Elytrigia atherica*	I	7-(7)-7
Potentilla anserina	I	2-(4)-5	*Glaux maritima*	I	3-(3)-3
Rumex crispus	I	+-(2)-3	*Kindbergia praelonga*	I	2-(2)-3
Bolboschoenus maritimus	I	1-(4)-5	*Larix kaempferi*	I	3-(3)-3
Aster tripolium	I	2-(2)-4	*Plantago lanceolata*	I	3-(5)-5
Beta vulgaris	I	2-(6)-7	*Plantago maritima*	I	+-(+)-+
Cirsium arvense	I	3-(3)-4	*Poa trivialis*	I	2-(3)-3
Dactylis glomerata	I	3-(5)-7	*Polygonum aviculare*	I	2-(3)-3
Lathyrus pratensis	I	+-(2)-2	*Rumex obtusifolius*	I	2-(3)-3
Rumex acetosa	I	2-(2)-3	*Trifolium repens*	I	2-(3)-3
Triglochin maritimum	I	2-(3)-4	*Urtica dioica*	I	2-(4)-4
Arrhenatherum elatius	I	1-(3)-4	*Veronica montana*	I	1-(1)-1
Juncus gerardii	I	3-(4)-4	*Veronica persica*	I	3-(3)-3
Poa pratensis/humilis	I	3-(3)-5	*Vicia sativa*	I	+-(+)-+
Ranunculus repens	I	3-(4)-5	*Vicia sepium*	I	4-(4)-4

Affinities

GHI: CM2 Upper salt marsh / GS4 Wet grassland

ZM: JC01C Agropyro-Rumicion Nordhagen 1940 nom. ambig. rejic. propos. / QF03A Convolvulo arvensis-Agropyrion repentis Görs 1967

EUNIS: A2.515 *Elymus repens* saltmarsh driftlines / E2.7 Unmanaged mesic grassland

NVC: SM28 *Elymus repens* salt-marsh community (55.3%)

Annex I: 1330 Atlantic salt meadows

Proxy environmental data

Light: 7.2 Reaction: 6.8 Wetness: 5.3 Fertility: 6.6 Salinity: 1.8

Conservation value

Although these swards are off low plant diversity (species/4 m^2 = 6.1, n = 39), coastal instances constitute part of the spectrum of communities within the EU HD Annex I habitat 1330 Atlantic salt meadows. In gardens and on agricultural land *Elytrigia repens* is regarded as a pernicious weed.

Management

In coastal situations, these are ungrazed swards that are likely to be replaced by other saltmarsh communities following the introduction of livestock. Sea-level rises as a result of climate change will have an impact, particularly in areas susceptible to coastal squeeze. As they occur at the very top of the saltmarsh profile, they are also vulnerable to reclamation. In inland situations these swards tend to occur where agricultural practices have lapsed.

Key references

Perrin, P.M., Waldren, S., Penk, M.R., O'Neill, F.H. (2020) Saltmarsh Function and Human Impacts in Relation to Ecological Status (SAMFHIRES) (2015-W-MS-19) (EPA Research Report No. 313). Environmental Protection Agency, Wexford.

Synopsis version: V1.2 **Synopsis date:** April 2025 **Synopsis author(s):** P.M. Perrin

Photo 1. SM7A *Elytrigia repens* coarse grassland, Kilmacleague West, Waterford (P. Perrin, August 2018)

Photo 2. SM7A *Elytrigia repens* coarse grassland with *Beta vulgaris*, Dundalk Bay, Louth (E. Virkki, July 2017)