

▶ Why do birds not move to other parts of the shore?

Some birds are able to move to other locations. Most birds however travel in numbers and require large areas of inter-tidal habitat to feed throughout the tidal cycle. Even small habitat losses can have disproportionately negative impacts on wintering bird populations.

▶ Does Common Cord-Grass pose any other problems?

Common Cord-Grass threatens the development of native saltmarsh, one of our most interesting and rarest habitats with plant species such as the colourful Sea-Aster, Sea-Pink and Sea-Lavender. It also invades established lower saltmarsh, smothering smaller species and may even impede farmland drainage behind the marsh.

▶ Why was Common Cord-Grass not seen as a potential problem at the time of introduction?

Often it takes time before the impact of an introduced species becomes apparent. For some introduced species this may be several decades. Some species can take several years for the population to develop to the point where impacts are observed.

▶ Does Common Cord-Grass have any benefits?

The ability of Common Cord-Grass to trap silt and stabilise soft sediments has resulted in its use to reclaim land from the sea, for example in Holland and China it has been used for this purpose extensively. The Chinese also use it to feed goats and carp and for making paper. However, the coastal conditions in Northern Ireland make it unsuitable for reclaiming land.

▶ How can it be controlled?

A number of techniques have been utilised and trialled in Common Cord-Grass control programmes world-wide. These have included mechanical methods, such as digging, bulldozing, cutting, grazing, smothering and mowing. Herbicides are also commonly used due to their effectiveness and reduction in impact on non-target species in comparison to mechanical methods.

▶ Further Information is available on www.doeni.gov.uk/niea and www.invasivespeciesireland.com

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Images

[Paul Corbett](#) (Common Cord-Grass and Sea-Lavender)

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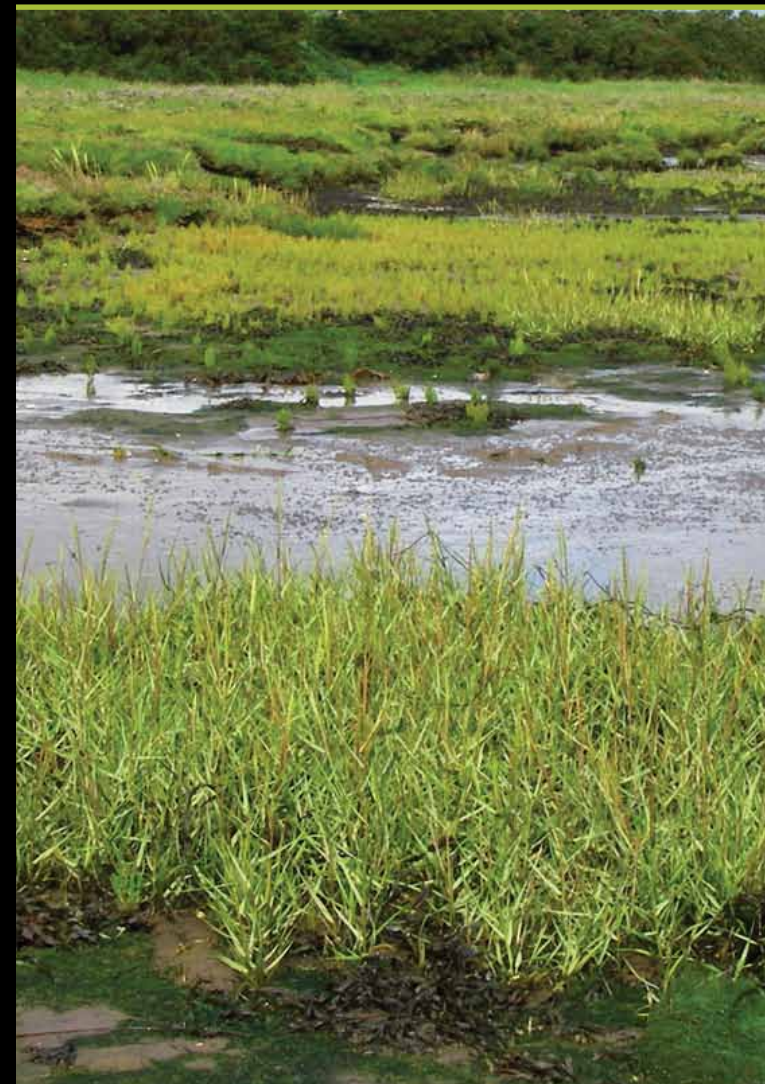
Our aim is to protect, conserve and promote the natural environment and built heritage for the benefit of present and future generations.

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COMMON CORD-GRASS

Frequently asked questions



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▶ What is Common Cord-Grass?

Common Cord-Grass, also known as *Spartina anglica*, is a plant of the intertidal zone.

Common Cord-Grass is an invasive perennial grass that grows mostly on soft muddy or sandy intertidal habitats. It is the product of a hybridisation event that occurred on the south coast of England approximately 140 years ago between the native Small Cord-grass (*Spartina maritima*) and the introduced *Spartina x alterniflora* from America. *Spartina anglica* has tough, pointed leaves, with flower stems that can grow from 50 cm to 1 metre tall. It also forms a dense mat of underground roots which enable it to spread quickly.

▶ Where does it grow?

Common Cord-Grass grows on sheltered seashores and estuaries on a variety of substrates including clays, fine silts, organic muds, sands and shingle where it tolerates submersion in salt water for several hours during the tidal cycle. It can also occupy the seaward edge of native saltmarsh communities where there is little or no competing vegetation. Individual clumps may be found at higher elevations within the salt marsh, with the species upper limit believed to be determined by competition from other vegetation.

At lower elevations, the distribution of *Spartina anglica* is limited by wave action. It is more successful in sheltered sites, due to reduced wave action not damaging seedlings.



Spartina invading native saltmarsh communities

▶ How did it get here?

The first planting in Northern Ireland took place at Belfast Lough in 1929 to stabilise soft sediments. Thankfully it never successfully established in Belfast Lough. It was however subsequently introduced into Strangford Lough during the 1940's to increase sediment accretion in coastal protection schemes, prior to its negative environmental impacts becoming known. It has also been found in Inner Dundrum Bay, Lough Foyle and the Roe estuary.

▶ How does it spread?

Spread generally occurs in three phases. In the first phase initial colonisation by seedlings or vegetational fragments occurs over a period of one to two years, followed by a phase of slow clonal growth as seedlings establish. Once established, the plants experience a burst of prolific expansion and hence can quickly colonise areas.

Underground roots called rhizomes enable the grass to spread quickly and form large clumps. Where these clumps are numerous, they gradually merge to form a meadow. *Spartina anglica* can form continuous meadows which can cover many hectares in extent.



Brent Geese - overwinter at Strangford Lough and feed on Eel-Grass

▶ Why is the spread of Common Cord-Grass considered to be a problem to birds?

Common Cord-Grass is an invasive alien species of grass that poses a real threat to the ecology of our coastal habitats. It grows in areas that are important feeding and roosting grounds for large flocks of wildfowl and wading birds which migrate here to overwinter. It is a major concern due to the loss of habitat for feeding and roosting.

The birds spend the winter feeding on Eel-grass (*Zostera* beds) and on the rich supply of worms, shellfish and other invertebrates in the sediment. This food supply is lost as the *Spartina anglica* spreads and smothers out the Eel-grass beds resulting in knock on effects such as the death of invertebrates. Waders are also likely to be affected by invasion as dense stands physically prevent their access to feeding areas.

▶ Can birds eat Common Cord-Grass?

Some wildfowl species may include the occasional Common Cord-Grass seed or even a few young leaves in their diet. None are however known to be able to eat the tough, mature foliage. The plant is of no value to waders, which eat invertebrates.



Sea-Lavender, a Northern Ireland Priority Species