

## ***Zostera marina* L.**

## **Eelgrass**

Native

GB: Near Threatened

England: Vulnerable

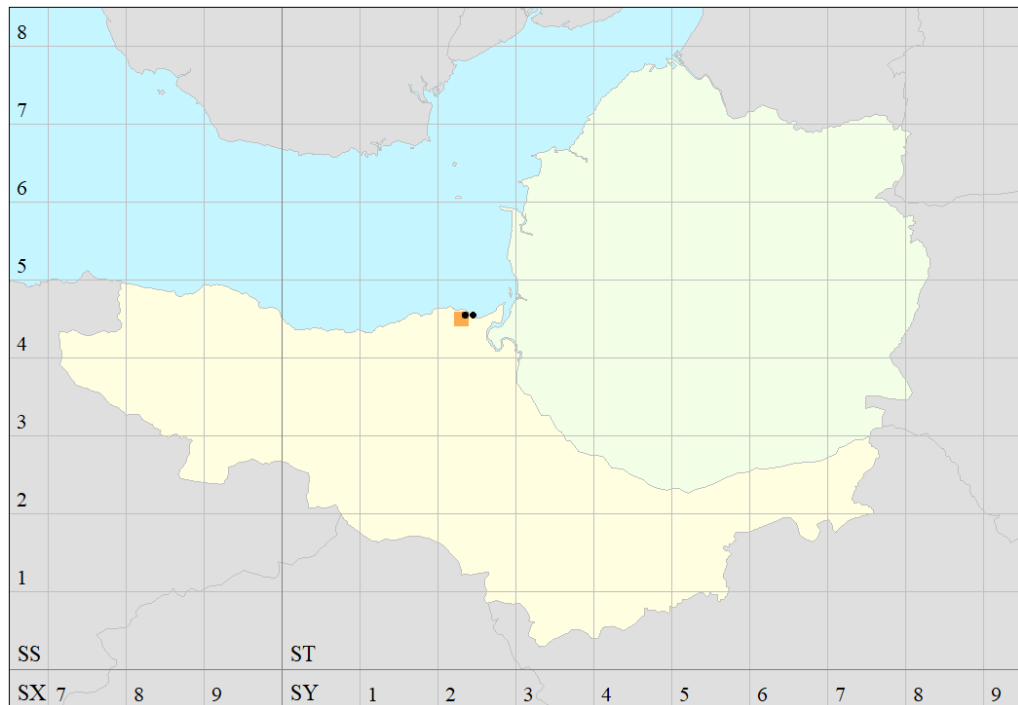
VC5 Rare; VC6 Lost

Marine herbaceous perennial growing on coastal or estuarine fine gravel, sand or mud in the intertidal or subtidal zone. In VC5 only recorded at Stolford, where first found in 1957 by D.S. Ranwell. The label of his specimen (in **TTN**) gave the site as “Mudflats off Catsford Common ... at low tide in fresh-water drainage runnels with mud and pebble bottoms lying between soft mud ridges” (FitzGerald, 2019). In 1969, H.W. Boon recorded it on the shore at Stolford at ST238458, following up a record by the Nature Conservancy. It was not found again until 2013, when recorded during an intertidal survey by Natural England, the record passed to Stephen Parker. In 2018 five adventurous Somerset botanists undertook an intrepid expedition to record the location and extent of Eelgrass at this site (FitzGerald, 2019). Plants were found on gravel in small channels kept clear of mud by water outflow from below a shingle bar, within a triangular area of about 16,000 m<sup>2</sup>, between the grid references given in the table below. In VC6, there have been several records along the coast between Burnham-on-Sea and Brean Down. Some past records were clearly for stranded leaves rather than rooted plants, making it difficult to be certain when and where this species has grown in VC6. It was first recorded at Burnham by J. Poole (Watson, 1837), subsequently found in 1859 by Thomas Clark in the tidal Brue by White House, and seen there by Murray (1896). St Brody (1856) knew it in muddy pools near Brean Down. It was recorded on the shore between Burnham and Brean by J.W. White (Murray, 1896) and in 1921 H.S. Thompson found a very little in two pools on the new saltmarsh (now gone) which had developed between Burnham and Berrow (Thompson, 1929). A single strand was picked up by Miss Miller on Gore Sands [Burnham-on-Sea] in 1928 (Miller, 1933), and White (1929) reported that in 1928 Miss Miller found leaves cast up on Brean Sands. More recently, in 2015 a stranded leaf was found on the beach at Burnham by Helena Crouch and Fred Rumsey. In 1916 Mrs C.I. Sandwith and Miss I.M. Roper recorded *Zostera marina* var. *angustifolia* at low water in Kewstoke Bay (White, 1919); Mr Gibbons later found leaves in Sand Bay, Kewstoke (White, 1929), and in 2020 Helena Crouch and Fred Rumsey found substantial quantities of both this species and *Z. noltei* on the beach of Sand Bay, Kewstoke. No rooted plants could be found and there have been no records of *Zostera* actually growing in VC6 for a century. *Zostera marina* has declined throughout its European range, partly as a result of disease; however, it is a problematic species to record *in situ* and, with some records representing stranded leaves only, it is difficult to assess whether it has declined.



*Zostera* leaves stranded on the beach at Sand Bay (2020). Photo: HJC

VC5					
Catsford Common	SSSI	ST23764587	2018	RFitzG, JW, ITS, GEL, SJP	On gravel in small channels kept clear of mud
Catsford Common	SSSI	ST23824596	2018	RFitzG, JW, ITS, GEL, SJP	On gravel in small channels kept clear of mud
Catsford Common	SSSI	ST24034575	2018	RFitzG, JW, ITS, GEL, SJP	On gravel in small channels kept clear of mud



Distribution of *Zostera marina* rooted in Somerset, mapped using MapMate.  
Black dots: post-2000 records; sepia squares: pre-1987 records



*Zostera marina* rooted on the shore at Catsford Common (2018). Photo: GEL