

An Enigma of an Ecosystem

Look closely and you may notice that this place is quite unusual. Why does the water appear, then disappear only hours later? When you rub the grass, what are the crystals that you may feel growing on the blades? Was that an animal sound coming from between those long straw-like reeds? These are some of the mysteries of this rare ecosystem.

This is a tidal marsh; a wetland controlled by tides rolling in from the Pacific Ocean, causing daily changes in water levels

and locations. The rising tide fills twisting creeks, known as tidal channels, and ponds with water. As the tide recedes, a soggy, muddy surface full of shellfish, worms and other invertebrates is exposed, and suddenly mealtime has arrived for hungry shorebirds.

This semi-salty environment is a refuge for plants and animals whose mysteries are waiting for us to discover.



Ridgway's rail (*Rallus obsoletus*) is an endangered bird that has been spotted here. Did you know that these birds have specialized mouthparts that allow them to drink saltwater? It's like having a water filter in your own body!



Salt Grass (*Distichlis spicata*) is a special grass. Unlike most grasses it can live in salty water. Look closely, you can even see the salt crystals on its leaves!