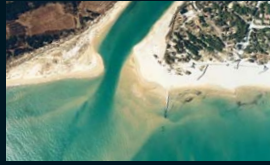
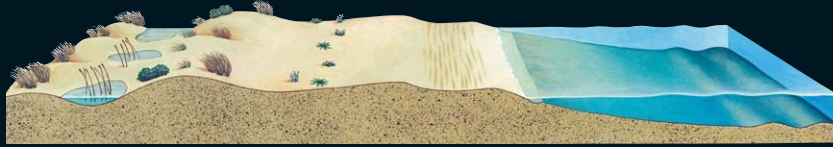


Long swathes of sand, or tiny coves nestling between rocky extremities: the coastline of Italy, curving down into the centre of the Mediterranean, is 7000 km long. More than 3000 km are composed of that special transitional zone separating sea from land, the beach.



Beaches are the result of constant modelling by sea and wind, dynamic and continually changing systems, fed by enormous quantities of sediments which rivers bring to the sea, balancing similar quantities which the sea removes from beaches.



In this complex relationship, an essential role is played by the development of pioneering vegetation on sand dunes, anchoring and consolidating them. Many endemic plants live in these harsh environments, subject to extreme variations in temperature, great aridity, and saltiness. Precisely because of their peculiar features, some plants, like the splendid *Matthiola sinuata*, are protected by European legislation.



A few tiny sandy bays on Italian islands are the last places where the turtle (*Caretta caretta*) lays its eggs in spring. These natural environments, and the animals and plants which live in them, are counted among Italy's treasures, but they are severely threatened by excessive tourist expansion and exploitation, and must be protected.



Sand dunes and beaches

Sand dunes and beaches

ITALIAN HABITATS

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Ministero dell'Ambiente e della Tutela del Territorio
Museo Friulano di Storia Naturale

