



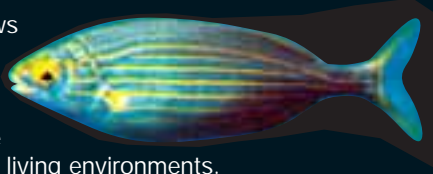
Seagrass meadows are unexpectedly fascinating habitats in coastal marine and brackish environments, and are precious - both as submerged landscapes and for the ecological role they play.



Seagrasses are monocotyledon angiosperms - flowering plants like corn and grass - which originally developed on land and returned to the sea about 120 million years ago. These plants are quite different from algae, with which they are often confused, since they have flowers, fruit and seeds. In addition to *Posidonia oceanica* (also known as Neptune grass) and *Cymodocea nodosa*, Italian seas also host the relatively rare *Zostera marina* and *Nanozostera noltii* and the non-indigenous species *Halophila stipulacea*.



These meadows are refuges for many animals - for some, they are even exclusive living environments.



The Habitats Directive 92/43/CEE lists Neptune grass meadows as key environments with important roles as bio-indicators, because they can highlight environmental quality better and more thoroughly than any other microbiological, chemical or physical parameter. Unfortunately, *Posidonia* meadows are now substantially being reduced in size along most of the Italian coastline.

