

Coastal Ecology

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Coastal environments provide niches for vegetation and animal species that do not exist elsewhere. Firstly, there is salt marsh. Stagnant or slow-moving water found behind a spit or in a lagoon, can provide the perfect conditions for deposition of sediment to form mud-flats. Once enough material has been laid down for land to become exposed at low-tide, specialist plants (known as pioneer species) can colonise the site. They are specially adapted to the extreme conditions found in the inter-tidal zone. Plants such as eel grass and salicornia can survive regular submersion by salt water, whilst are also tolerant of the drying effect of strong winds at low tide.

In Malta

These communities generally consist of saline pools due to the mixing of sea water with rainwater as well as saline marshlands in low lying areas. These coastal marshes are muddy with pools of brackish water . As the dry season approaches the water evaporates, coming more brackish until it disappears completely. Therefore yet again specialized organisms that are able to adapt to this type of habitat live here. Some species are typical of both freshwater and saline waters since some coastal wetlands are transitional between freshwater wetlands and saline marshlands. As for the

few sandy beaches on the island, very small dune systems remain to this day. the few that are left are inhabited by dune grasses such as the Sand Couch and the Marram Grass. An example of an existing saline marshland is the one in Ghadira, which is currently used as a Bird Sanctuary.

- Animals

Animals living along the coast vary enormously, some live along coasts to nest like puffins, sea turtles and rock hopper penguins. Sea snails and various kinds of barnacles live on the coast and scavenge on food deposited by the sea. Most coastal animals are used to humans in developed areas, such as dolphins and seagulls who eat food thrown for them by tourists.

There are many kinds of seabirds on the coast. Pelicans and cormorants join up with terns and oystercatchers to forage for fish and shellfish on the coast.

- Plants

Coastal areas are famous for their kelp beds. Kelp is a fast growing seaweed that grows up to a meter a day. Corals and anemones are true animals, but live a similar lifestyle as plants do. Mangroves and salt marsh are important coastal vegetation types in topical and temperate environments respectively.





Source:

<http://www.emwis-mt.org>