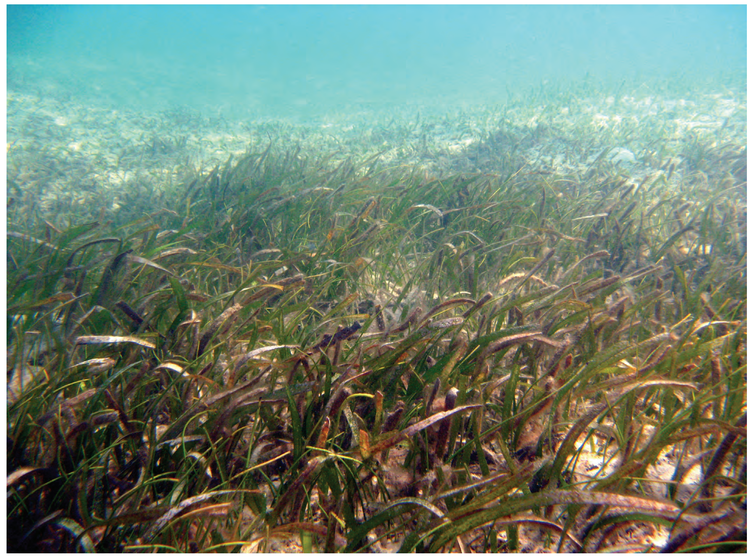
COOPER'S ISLAND NATURE RESERVE

Seagrass Habitat

Seagrass

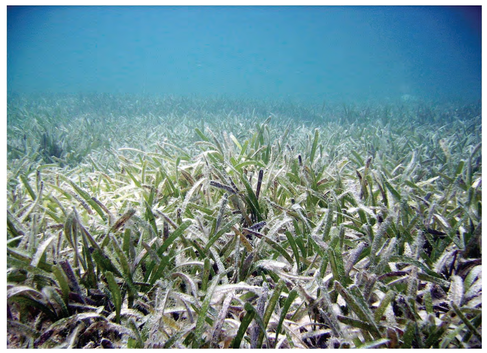


Three species of **seagrass** are found growing on the sea floor in the shallow bays around Coopers Island. They are turtle grass, manatee grass and shoal grass. Seagrasses are true plants, with leaves, stems, roots and flowers. Unlike any other flowering plant, all seagrasses grow and reproduce fully submerged in marine environments. Seagrasses have small, inconspicuous flowers and special methods for the underwater pollination and for the dispersal of their seeds. They also have well-developed underground horizontal stem and root systems that extend deeply into sand and mud bottoms to anchor and support them within their surrounding liquid environment.

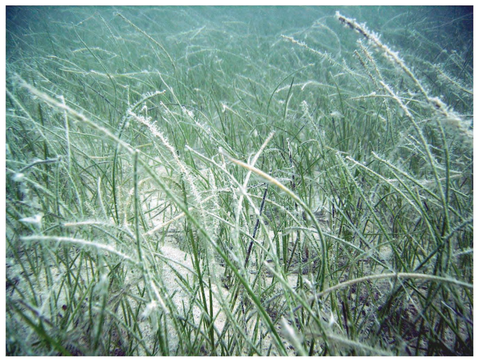
Seagrasses provide a diversity of important services in the marine environment. Like other plants, seagrasses photosynthesize releasing oxygen and this helps maintain healthy conditions for all marine organisms. The roots of seagrasses hold sediments in place and reduce erosion of our coastlines during rough weather. Seagrasses provide essential food for a number of marine animals and a sheltered home for many animals and for other plants.

Green turtles are one of the best known animals that feed almost entirely on seagrass. Seagrass is also eaten by some young or small fish, by small snails and by crustaceans. These smaller fish and crustaceans are eaten by larger fish and crustaceans and become links in the food chain to the even larger fish that are caught in sport fisheries and by commercial fishermen. Seagrass meadows help to increase the amount of food that is available to other animals, such as spiny lobsters and conch, as they eat other animals or algae, living in the seagrass. Seagrass meadows provide a sheltered home to literally hundreds of species of plants and animals. All of these have important roles in the seagrass meadow community; some are especially different or rare, like the seahorses; and some are valuable food items as adults, like young spiny lobsters and grouper.

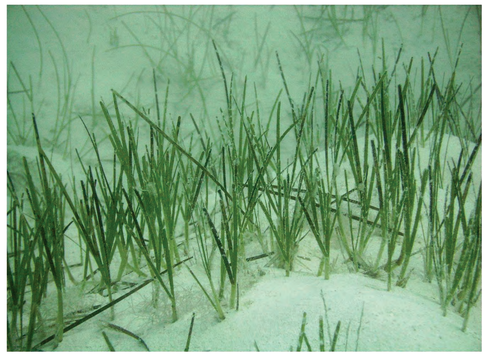
Turtle grass
(*Thalassia testudinum*)
has flattened leaf blades, generally about 1 cm wide, and scaly rhizomes



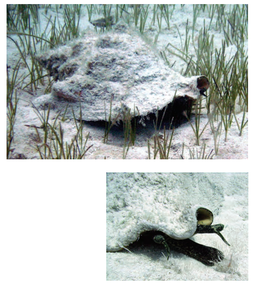
Manatee Grass
(*Syringodium filiforme*)
has cylindrical leaf blades.



Shoal Grass
(*Halodule* sp.)
has flattened leaf blades generally les than 3 mm width.



Green Turtle
(*Chelonia mydas*)
look for patches of seagrass that look like they have been mowed, this is where green turtles have been feeding.

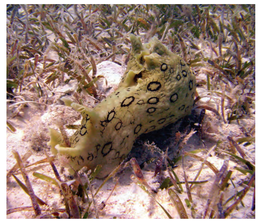


Queen Conch
(*Strombus gigas*)

A protected species that lives in seagrass beds.

Sea Horse

Some species of seahorses live in seagrass beds.



Spotted Sea Hare
(*Aplysia dactylomela*)

Feeds on algae in the seagrass beds. When agitated it will discharge a harmless viscous, purple fluid

Pen Shell
(*Pinna carnea*)

A bivalve that partially buries in the sand and is common in seagrass beds.

For further information please contact the Department of Conservation Services:- (441) 293-2727 or visit our website:- www.conservation.bm