

MEDITERRANEAN PLANET

PHOTOGRAPHS AND TEXTS: LAURENT BALLESTA

ART BOOKS, ILLUSTRATED BOOKS, ENVIRONMENT, NATURE, BIODIVERSITY
PROTECTION, ADVENTURE, WILDLIFE

TECHNICAL FEATURES

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ARTE, CNC.

Are we still capable of producing truly original images on the Mediterranean? Are there still surprises to be discovered?

This project is extraordinary, in the strictest sense of the term, as in something out of the ordinary since never before could these ecosystems both so distant, given their inaccessibility, and so close be studied and illustrated in such a manner."

Laurent Ballesta

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The Mediterranean Planet project

The Mediterranean... Knowing that man has been traveling these waters for thousands of years, it's easy to imagine that the sea no longer holds any secrets. Knowing that it has been conquered and mistreated, easy to imagine that it's also been devastated. And yet, the Mediterranean remains a thriving body of water still waiting to be fully explored.

Over its depths lie extensive and abundant territories that mankind has barely gotten to know: the coral reefs. These biodiversity 'hotspots' whose beauty rivals that of the reefs lie in the «twilight zone» between 60 and 120 m (196 and 393 ft) below the surface, where less than 1% of light actually penetrates. Study, illustrate and expose the unfamiliar part of the teeming undersea life of the Mediterranean: such is the challenge undertaken by Laurent Ballesta, famous photographer, biologist and leader of expeditions.

This project not only pertains to optimizing scientific research efforts and technical performance, but more importantly it serves to promote a promise of **powerful and one-of-a-kind images**, commented in the publication *Mediterranean Planet*.

The photographer

Laurent Ballesta was the youngest photographer ever to receive the prestigious "Gold Diver" award at the International Festival of Underwater Images held in Antibes.

1999 > He was named scientific advisor in marine settings for the TV series Ushuaia Nature, alongside the explorer and show host Nicolas Hulot. For 12 consecutive years, he made the most of his travels in expanding his

compendium of deep-sea fauna from across the world.

2000 > Alongside Pierre Descamp, he founded the Eye of Andromeda Association, in the aim of reconciling oceanological studies with an artistic appreciation of the marine environment. This effort would lead in **2008** to the creation of a company, named Oceanological Andromeda.

2007 > He shot the deepest photograph ever taken by a diver, at 190 m (623 ft) underwater off the coast of Nice.

May 2009 > He organized a covert expedition to South Africa to realize a dream, namely diving with Gombessa (another name given to the area's coelacanth fish) and bringing back the very first photograph of the living fossil taken by a diver 120 m (393 ft) underwater. This mission would lead to the first Gombessa expedition, 4 years later, to carry out the initial scientific protocols on a living coelacanth specimen at a depth of 120 m (393 ft).

Since then, Laurent Ballesta has led 4 Gombessa expeditions: The Grouper Mystery (2015), Antarctica, On the Footsteps of the Emperor (2017), and 700 Sharks in the Dead of Night (2018).

In 2017, «The Hidden Face of the Iceberg», ushered in History's first photographic series revealing an iceberg in its entirety, and earning him the prestigious **"Wildlife Photographer of the Year"** award in the category Earth Environments. **Laurent Ballesta is now renowned as one of the world's leading underwater photographerse.**

The Book

Mediterranean Planet forms a sequel to Laurent Ballesta's latest works: *Secrets d'Océans*

When ecology is viewed as a lost cause, exploration and conservation become the noblest of battles. If dreams can still be cherished, then the first step is to peel away the illusions. In looking back at my previous expeditions, I believe that this project is both the boldest and most proximate since it takes place right here in the Mediterranean. As for the technical and sports performance aspects, we've broken new ground, and I'm not exaggerating. It's been 18 years that I've been waiting to explore under such conditions.

Laurent Ballesta.

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LAURENT BALLESTA

A REALISTIC DREAMER, AT THE CROSSROADS
OF SCIENCE AND IMAGE

LAURENT BALLESTA IS A PHOTOGRAPHER, BIOLOGIST
AND LEADER OF UNDERWATER EXPEDITIONS

(Oceans' Secrets), *Adélie Terre & Mer* (Adélie Earth & Sea) and *700 requins dans la nuit* (700 Sharks in the Dead of Night). It represents the accomplishment of his personal endeavors during the eponymous July 2019 expedition, while also providing closure to the more comprehensive effort underway in the Mediterranean. **This publication is thus a compilation of the biologist-photographer's most spectacular shots from 2010 through the present day.** Accompanied by minimal textual content, the photographs of rare creatures never before illustrated exhibiting unusual behavior tell the story with each page turned of natural history and lived history. From the extraordinary biodiversity of the coral reefs to the seascapes far beneath the surface, Laurent Ballesta has embarked on an excursion into these otherworldly ecosystems that actually exist on Earth and make up the Mediterranean Planet.

This book also conforms with the longstanding tradition of works that pay tribute to the marine world by offering unique insights into an ecosystem that has not yet unveiled all its secrets. After several deep-sea diving expeditions spanning the globe under the «Gombessa» flag, the Gombessa V "Mediterranean Planet" campaign is Laurent's last at the helm. A World First, this expedition meant Laurent Ballesta and three other divers would cohabitate for 28 days inside a 5-m2 pressurized module designed for both saturation diving and deep sport diving, from Marseille to Bandol, Carqueiranne to Saint-Tropez, Sainte-Maxime to Antibes, and finally from Antibes to Monaco.

Who's the audience?

- underwater diving enthusiasts, photography buffs
- an audience sensitive to an artistic approach. The choice of photos is artistically oriented and emphasizes emotion over description
- a curious audience, those who love nature and the marine environment: this book transports the reader through a Mediterranean thought to be familiar yet still able to startle by its unsuspected novelty
- a diverse audience with ties to the Mediterranean or who benefit from it.

More generally, customers of top-tier bookstores, an upscale clientele, readers of the press, those aware of today's environmental challenges and sensitive to environmental preservation causes.

Media publicity and promotional events

- RSF photo album championing freedom of the press: July 2nd 2020 edition dedicated to Laurent Ballesta's body of work
- Arte channel's broadcast of a documentary on the Mediterranean Planet project
- Previews of the Mediterranean Planet film across France + 6 festivals organized for autumn 2020
- Partnership concluded with Paris-Match magazine
- *Ocean Film Tour* planned in Germany

THE SPECS

- A retrospective of the biologist-photographer's most stunning pictures, from 2010 through today
- The visual recap of an expedition-event, a groundbreaking accomplishment, which will gain traction, notably via the documentary broadcast on ARTE
- Breathtaking underwater color sequences
- Images never before seen of the Mediterranean's biodiversity
- A tribute to the marine environment as well as to our natural heritage, under threat
- An internationally renowned photographer, one of the most widely acclaimed in his field
- Regional presentations of both the film and book across France

FOLLOW THE ADVENTURE...

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- > What secrets is the Mediterranean Sea keeping from us?
 - > What is its actual level of pollution?
 - > Is it a dead or living sea? A sea that has been damaged or on the mend?
 - > What treasures still await Man's discovery?
 - > Because all these questions of current vital importance lie at the heart of environmental debates.
 - > Because the Mediterranean Sea is more than just a large body of water, it's a small ocean with an oversized History.
 - > Because the Gombessa V expedition is like none other, offering lots to be learned and filled with hope...

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