

In memoriam Professor Patrice Francour

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In memoriam, Professor Patrice FRANCOUR

(April 13, 1960 – October 13, 2019)

It is with shock and great sadness that we heard of the sudden passing of our distinguished colleague and friend, Professor Patrice Francour, at the age of 59, from pancreatic cancer against which he courageously fought till the end. During his whole life, he worked to protect the seas and the oceans, especially the Mediterranean Sea, which was so dear to him.

Born in Paris in 1960, Patrice Francour studied marine biology and ecology at Paris VI University. For his master degree internship (DEA), he went to Marseille in 1984 to study the fauna of the *Posidonia oceanica* meadows with Prof. C.F. Boudouresque’s team. A few years later (1990), he completed his PhD at the Banyuls-sur-Mer Marine Station, under the dual auspices of Paris VI University and Aix-Marseille II University. His PhD was centered on the study of the dynamics of the *Posidonia oceanica* ecosystem in the Port-Cros National Park. He focused his research on quantifying the biomass variations of the different compartments of this ecosystem in order to develop the modelling of its trophic functioning. Subsequently (1994-1995), he worked as a postdoctoral researcher at the Portobello Marine Laboratory, in New Zealand, collaborating with Prof. E. Harvey’s Lab.

Patrice Francour worked as an active and much appreciated member at the *GIS Posidonie* in Marseille, until he was first recruited as an Assistant Professor at the University of Nice-Sophia Antipolis in 1998 in the Coastal Marine Environment Laboratory, headed by Prof. A. Meinesz. In addition to teaching ecology at the University, he was also at that time the director of the Natural Sciences Department, Nice IUFM, as he was deeply committed to the training of natural

24 sciences secondary school teachers. After his HDR (habilitation to supervise research) in 1999,
25 he was nominated Full Professor at the University of Nice-Sophia Antipolis in 2002. From 2008
26 to 2015, he was the Director of the ECOMERS Laboratory (a lab specialized in Marine Ecology
27 and Ecotoxicology), then Deputy Director since 2016. He was one of the contributors to the
28 development of this laboratory, now renamed as UMR ECOSEAS (Ecology and COnservation
29 Science for sustainable sEAS), specialized in Marine Socio-Ecology.

30 As a specialist in fish communities in rocky areas and seagrass beds (*Posidonia oceanica*), his
31 work mainly took place in marine protected areas (especially Port-Cros National Park, Scandola
32 Marine Reserve, Cap Roux-Saint Raphael Fishery Reserve). His research in fundamental marine
33 ecology was chiefly aimed at understanding the structure and dynamics of fish assemblages, the
34 role of biodiversity in ecosystem functioning and the importance of habitat structure. He also
35 contributed to numerous innovative approaches in applied marine ecology research. He
36 significantly contributed to improving the available knowledge on the effects of protection
37 measures on fish communities, the role of management in Mediterranean marine protected areas,
38 the sustainable exploitation of coastal marine resources by small-scale fisheries and the use of
39 artificial reefs for the restoration of local fishing resources.

40 On the strength of his expertise and competences, he was involved in the scientific committees
41 of several marine parks. As a participant and executive board member of the GEM grouper
42 research association (*Groupe d'Etude du Mérrou*), Patrice Francour had a passionate interest in
43 the grouper, these large peaceful fishes, curious and attracted by divers, but severely impacted by
44 humans, quite often locally extirpated because of the impact of recreational and professional
45 fishers. With other scientists, he was committed to the preservation of the emblematic and over-
46 exploited dusky grouper *Epinephelus marginatus* along the French coasts. As a fish expert, he

47 regularly published new or updated records of fish species reported from France or the
48 Mediterranean basin (Gobiidae, Kyphosidae, Siganidae, Fistulariidae, Oplegnathidae). One part
49 of this activity was devoted to the spread of non-indigenous species of fish in the North-Western
50 Mediterranean. He made a major contribution to the development of expertise to assist marine
51 protected area managers and staff members in assessing the effects of multiple human activities
52 (fishing, anchoring, etc.). Recently, he was also involved in citizen science to encourage
53 members of the public to participate in field monitoring of fish populations.

54 During his scientific career, Patrice Francour authored or co-authored more than 90
55 publications and 9 book chapters on echinoderms, fishes, seagrasses, artificial reefs and fish
56 invasions in the Mediterranean Sea. He supervised more than fifteen PhD students and a large
57 number of master's degree students. In addition to his teaching activities in biology and ecology,
58 he also undertook a wide range of scientific expert reports for various universities and scientific
59 agencies in France and abroad. In particular, he was since 2006 an active and highly appreciated
60 member of the IUCN Grouper and Wrasse Specialist Group, then too since 2012 of the Snapper,
61 Seabream and Grunt Specialist Group. He was working recently with IUCN colleagues on the
62 preparation of fish species assessments for the IUCN Red List of threatened marine fishes, on
63 both grouper and wrasse and certain other specific fish family groups, and on Mediterranean and
64 Eastern Atlantic marine fishes in general.

65 From New Zealand to the Mediterranean Sea, Patrice especially enjoyed field work, diving
66 with colleagues, observing fishes in nature, studying fish communities, tracking non-indigenous
67 species...while passing pleasant moments in good company. He especially liked challenges.

68 One event in particular in Patrice's life deserves to be highlighted. In 1988, Patrice Francour
69 narrowly escaped death during a field-trip devoted to the conservation of the monk seal in

70 Mauritania. He was the only survivor of a group of five, when their jeep hit a mine. He showed
71 great courage in recovering from his injuries, but remained profoundly affected by this tragedy.
72 If in that tragic event death let him escape, this has unfortunately not been the case with his
73 recent illness. The void he has left to family, friends and colleagues will remain unbridgeable.

74 But above all, we wish to remember him as he was. Patrice Francour was a researcher
75 motivated by a deeply passionate interest in marine life, he was an excellent underwater diver
76 and photographer, sometimes tempted to dive a little too deep for his diving buddies, attracted by
77 some small cryptic goby, one of his last passions! He dived underwater intensively throughout
78 his life, and again plunged below the surface of the sea for the last time in July 2019, just before
79 the worsening of his illness and his last journey.

80 Colleagues and friends, researchers and divers, students and collaborators will greatly miss
81 him, but we know for certain that anyone who knew him will keep alive the memory of the good
82 times spent together. Our deepest thoughts and sympathy are with his family.

83 Vale, ciao, salut Patrice and rest in peace in the divers' paradise with your beloved groupers...

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85 Mireille Harmelin-Vivien, Paolo Guidetti and Virginie Raybaud

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91 Figure 1. Patrice Francour. AG GEM 2010. © J.G. Harmelin



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93 Figure 2. Patrice Francour talking with a student before fish monitoring. GEM Monaco 2006. © J.G.
94 Harmelin



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96 Figure 3. Patrice Francour counting groupers in Port-Cros National Parc 2009. © J.M. Cottalorda

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