

**IN MEMORIAM,  
PROFESSOR PATRICE FRANCOUR  
(13 APRIL 1960–13 OCTOBER 2019)**

by

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It is with shock and great sadness that we heard of the sudden passing of our distinguished colleague and friend, Professor Patrice Francour (Fig. 1), 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.



**Fig. 1.** Patrice Francour at Carry-Le-Rouet (France) in the occasion of the General Assembly of GEM (Groupe d’Etude du Mériou) in 2010; © J.G. Harmelin

Born in Paris in 1960, Patrice Francour studied marine biology and ecology at Paris VI University. For his master’s degree internship (DEA) in 1984, he went to Marseille 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 thesis 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 modeling 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 and his associates.

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. At that time, in addition to teaching ecology at the University, he was also the director of the Natural Sciences Department, Nice IUFM, as he was deeply committed to the training of natural sciences secondary school teachers. After his HDR (habilitation to supervise research) in 1999, he was nominated Full Professor at the University of Nice Sophia Antipolis in 2002. From 2008 to 2015, he was the Director of the ECOMERS Laboratory (a lab specialized in Marine Ecology and Ecotoxicology), then Deputy Director since 2016. He was one of the contributors to the development of this laboratory, now renamed as UMR ECOSEAS (Ecology and Conservation Science for sustainable sEAS), specialized in Marine Socio-Ecology.

As a specialist in fish communities in rocky areas and seagrass beds (*Posidonia oceanica*), his work mainly

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**Fig. 2.** Patrice Francour talking with a student before grouper monitoring carried by GEM in Monaco, in October 2006; © J.G. Harmelin

took place in marine protected areas (especially Port-Cros National Park, Scandola Marine Reserve, Cap Roux-Saint Raphael Fishery Reserve, Larvotto Marine Reserve in Monaco Principality). His research in fundamental marine ecology was chiefly aimed at understanding the structure and dynamics of fish assemblages, the role of biodiversity in ecosystem functioning, and the importance of habitat structure. He also contributed to numerous innovative approaches in applied marine ecology research. He significantly contributed to improving the available knowledge on the effects of protection measures on fish communities, the role of management in Mediterranean marine protected areas, the sustainable exploitation of coastal marine resources by small-scale fisheries, and the use of artificial reefs for the restoration of local fishing resources.

On the strength of his expertise and competences, he was involved in the scientific committees of several marine parks. As a participant and executive board member of the GEM grouper research association (*Groupe d'Etude du Mérrou*) (Fig. 2), Patrice Francour had a passionate interest in the groupers, these large peaceful fishes, curious and attracted by divers, but severely impacted by humans, quite often locally extirpated because of the impact of recreational and professional fishers. With other scientists, he was committed to the preservation of the emblematic and over-exploited dusky grouper *Epinephelus marginatus* along the French coasts (Figs. 3–4). As a fish expert, he regularly published new or updated records of fish species reported from France or the Mediterranean basin (Gobiidae, Kyphosidae, Siganidae, Fistulariidae, Oplegnathidae). One part of this activity was devoted to the spread of non-indigenous species of fish in the north-

western Mediterranean. He made a major contribution to the development of expertise to assist marine protected area managers and staff members in assessing the effects of multiple human activities (fishing, anchoring, etc.). Recently, he was also involved in citizen science to encourage members of the public to participate in field monitoring of fish populations.

During his scientific career, Patrice Francour authored or co-authored more than 90 publications (in international journals; see the complete list in Annex 1) and 9 book chapters on echinoderms, fishes, seagrasses, artificial reefs, and fish invasions in the Mediterranean Sea. He supervised more than fifteen PhD students and a large number of master's degree students. In addition to his teaching activities in biology and ecology, he also undertook a wide range of scientific expert reports for various universities and scientific agencies in France and abroad. In particular, since 2006, he was an active and highly appreciated member of the IUCN Grouper and Wrasse Specialist Group, then too since 2012 of the Snapper, Seabream, and Grunt Specialist Group. He was working recently with IUCN colleagues on the preparation of fish species assessments for the IUCN Red List of threatened marine fishes, on both grouper and wrasse and certain other specific fish family groups, and on Mediterranean and Eastern Atlantic marine fishes in general.

One of the additional academic activities of Patrice was his involvement in scientific journals and funding agencies, as a reviewer, expert, board member, or editor. He was a reviewer for *Acta Ichthyologica et Piscatoria*, *Aquatic Conservation*, *Aquatic Invasions*, *Aquatic Living Resources*, *Biological Conservation*, *Environmental Conservation*, *Fisheries Research*, *Journal of Environmental Management*, *Journal of Fish Biology*, *Journal of the Marine Biological Association of the United Kingdom*, *Marine Biodiversity Records*, *Marine Biology*, *Marine Ecology Progress Series*, *Marine Environmental Research*, *Marine and Freshwater Research*, *PloS One*, and *Scientia Marina*. As a renowned expert, in addition to the journals, he helped many funding agencies to evaluate applications: Fonds (National) de la Recherche Scientifique (F.R.S.-FNRS) (Belgium); Institut Français de Recherche pour l'Exploitation de la Mer (IFREMER) (France); Agence Nationale de la Recherche (ANR) (France); Association Nationale Recherche Technologie – Conventions Industrielles de Formation par la Recherche (ANRT-CIFRE) (France); Commission Nationale Flotte Côtière (CNFC); Institut de Recherche pour le Développement (IRD), France; Private Foundations (France); Israeli Ministry of Science and Technology; and the American University of Beirut. His expertise in marine biology, ecology, and ichthyology had been acknowledged by journals that invited him to their editorial boards: *Mésogée* (2004–2019), *Marine Life* (2005–2019), *Pelagos* (2006–2019), and *Acta Ichthyologica et Piscatoria* (2009–2010). Patrice was also an Associate Editor at *Acta Ichthyologica et Piscatoria* (2010–2019) and *Scientific World Journal* (2013–2019). It would be difficult to estimate the total number of

reviews and expert opinions done by Patrice. Only for a single journal, such as *Acta Ichthyologica et Piscatoria* he provided at least 24 reviews. He devoted ten years of his life to *Acta Ichthyologica et Piscatoria* as an Associate Editor. During that time, he supervised 85 manuscripts. His recommendations directed to the editor-in-chief helped to improve the final papers. Patrice's high professional reputation helped him to find suitable reviewers without a delay with only very few experts declined such invitations (finding reviewers becomes a very serious problem in



**Fig. 3.** Patrice Francour diving on the wreck *Donator* at Porquerolles (France) in July 2018; © Jerome Espla



**Fig. 4.** Patrice Francour counting groupers in Port-Cros National Parc 2009; © J.M. Cottalorda

academic publishing nowadays). He was very active in the developments of the journal always finding time to respond to inquiries of the editor-in-chief, suggesting best solutions, welcoming new members of the board, etc. Patrice was a great friend and colleague and he stood on his editorial post till the very end...

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

One event in particular in Patrice's life deserves to be highlighted. In 1988, Patrice Francour narrowly escaped death during a field-trip devoted to the conservation of the monk seal in Mauritania. He was the only survivor of a group of five, when their jeep hit a mine. He showed great courage in recovering from his injuries but remained profoundly affected by this tragedy. If in that tragic event death let him escape, this has unfortunately not been the case with his recent illness. The void he has left to family, friends, and colleagues will remain unbridgeable.

But above all, we wish to remember him as he was. Patrice Francour was a researcher motivated by a deeply passionate interest in marine life, he was an excellent

underwater diver and photographer, sometimes tempted to dive a little too deep for his diving buddies, attracted by some small cryptic goby, one of his last passions! He dived underwater intensively throughout his life, and again plunged below the surface of the sea for the last time in July 2019, just before the worsening of his illness and his last journey.

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

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

**Epilogue:** this text, with marginal modifications and few citations that have been added here, has been the object of a previously published obituary (Harmelin-Vivien et al. 2020) dedicated to Prof. Patrice Francour.

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