

LAURENT BALLESTA

EXPLORER

NATURALIST PHOTOGRAPHER

- EXPEDITIONS

- 1998 / 1999 16 months as **marine biologist in charge of fish larvae recruitment and colonization program** for the French Polynesian Ministry of Marine Resources in Rangiroa Atoll, Tuamotu Archipelago, French Polynesia
- 1999 / 2011 **scientific advisor in marine environment** for the french TV prime time show Ushuaia Nature on channel 1, alongside explorer and presenter Nicolas Hulot
- **29 filming and exploring missions** and participated in 23 shows
 - **New-Zealand, New-Guinea, Borneo, French Polynesia, Madagascar, Russian Siberia , Soudan, Baja California, Mongolia, Ecuador, Galapagos Islands, Arctic, Australia, Chili, Botswana, South Africa, Costa Rica, Belize, Indonesia, Philippines, Amazonia, Bahamas, Cuba, Namibia, Iceland, Mozambique, Tchad, Russian Kamtchatka.**
- Oct 2001 - **leader of an eco-highlighting program** of the underwater patrimony of **French Polynesia**
- 40 days of expedition
 - making of posters illustrating biodiversity of the different archipelagos (Marquises, Australes, Soci  t  , Tuamotu)
- Mars 2002 - **leader of an eco-highlighting program** of the underwater patrimony of the "**National Park of Aqaba**" in **Jordan**, a program funded by the World Bank
- 50 days of expedition.
 - making of posters illustrating the different ecosystems and behaviors (coral reef, sandy bottom, underwater meadows, predation technics, symbiosis)
- June 2004 - scientific mission in Rangiroa atoll, French Polynesia
- 40 days of expedition
 - **study and film for the first time the reproductive behavior of grey reef sharks** (Carcharhinus amblyrhynchos)
- 2002 / 2015 - **26 missions of deep diving naturalistic explorations in the west Mediterranean Sea** (France, Corsica, Italia, Sardinia, Spain, Balearics, Tunisia)
- Fev. 2006 -**first deep dives for naturalistic observations in the channels of Land of Fire, Patagonia**
- Fev. 2007 - 2x 30 days of expedition
- first pictures of numerous **species never illustrated in their natural habitat**
- January 2008 - mission to **explore and photograph the deep ecosystems of Lifou island, New Caledonia**
- 30 days of expedition
 - **deep technical diving : - 160m/540 ft**
 - picture taken of **2 new species, an alcyonarian and a sea star**
- April 2009 - 1st « secret » expedition to **Sodwana Bay, South Africa** to confirm the presence of the **coelacanth in the Mozambique channel, - 120m/395 ft deep**
- January 2010 - 2nd expedition to Sodwana Bay, South Africa
- 35 days on expedition
 - **very first photographs of the coelacanth by a diver**
 - deep technical dives : - 120 m/395 ft

April 2013

GOMBESSA I - Meeting with the coelacanth in South Africa

- **3rd expedition to Sodwana Bay, South Africa**
- 40 days of expedition
- **scientific protocols in partnership with the National Museum of Natural History of Paris, and scientists of University of Liège, Belgium.**
- film and photograph the coelacanth while **conducting scientific protocols in situ**
- **2 new species of fish discovered**
- deep technical diving : - **120 m/395 ft to conduct the protocols**
- **scientific publication in Science**
- article in **National Geographic International / USA**
- documentary film « The coelacanth, a dive into our past »

July 2014

GOMBESSA II - Groupers' mating in Fakarava

- **1st expedition to the south pass of Fakarava atoll in French Polynesia**
- 45 days of expedition
- **scientific protocols in partnership with the laboratory of the Criobe of Moorea to assess the size of grouper and shark populations (18000 groupers / 700 sharks)**
- study, photograph and film the **grouper spawning for the first time at 1000 images per sec**
- **24 hours record dive with a very new decompression protocol** to allow a whole dive of **24 hours at 20m/66 ft deep** > observing a whole cycle of day and night with all changes implied concerning animal behavior and predation
- **scientific publication in Current Biology**
- documentary film « The grouper mystery »

July 2015

- **2nd expedition to the south pass of Fakarava atoll in French Polynesia**
- 20 days of expedition
- **scientific protocols to assess the size of grouper and shark populations**
- film and photograph **grouper spawning**
- film and photograph **shark predation at night**
- evaluate the possibility to dive down in the bottom, **in the fray of hunting sharks**

Oct/Dec 2015

GOMBESSA III - Deep ecosystems of Antarctica

- expedition led by Luc Jacquet (film director of Oscar awarded "March of the penguin") in the **french scientific Base of Dumont d'Urville, Terre Adélie, Antarctica**
- **3 months of expedition**
- **explore and photograph for the first time the deep ecosystems of Antarctica.**
- **first deepest and longest polar dives in history : 5 hours**
- **first pictures of numerous species never illustrated in their natural habitat**
- documentary « Antarctica »

July 2016

- **3rd expedition to the south pass of Fakarava atoll in French Polynesia**
- 45 days of expedition
- monitoring of scientific protocols to assess the size of grouper and shark populations
- **spotting for further scientific studies to be conducted in 2017**
- photograph and film the hunts of grey reef sharks at night.
- the team totalled more than **200 hours of night dives** and gathered **unique footage and photographs of sharks hunting behaviour**

February 2017

- Deep diving campaign down to -360ft on the **lava field off the Piton de la Fournaise volcano, La Réunion Island**
- 15 days of expedition
- **exploration mission** on the lava field created underwater by the 2007 eruption of the volcano

- 4th **expedition in the south pass of Fakarava atoll**, French Polynesia
- **55 days of expedition**
- 32 people on field, 5 different nationalities
- In June 2014 While the **GOMBESSA II expedition** Laurent Ballesta discovered a unique phenomenon : at night, **700 grey sharks hunt in a spectacular frenzy**, showing unique predation behaviour. Since, he returned every year to get ready for this ultimate expedition : a study about the night hunts of the shark pack.

The expedition focused on 3 major studies

1 - Analysis of the hunts thanks to 3D models and the use of the Bullet Time Shot technique, for the first time on animal behaviours. The team established that the hunts are not anarchic but part of them rely on social organisation within the pack. They inserted acoustic tags with accelerometers in the abdomen of 40 sharks to follow their movements in the channel for a whole year.

2 - Acoustic study of the pass to establish it's « sound ID » and isolate fish sounds to understand their motivations : communication, stress, rest...

3 - Exploration of the deep zones of neighbouring atolls to compare the landscape of the slopes with the ones of Fakarava, while diving at -375ft.

• AWARDS & DISTINCTIONS

- 2000 - Plongeur d'Or, Festival Mondial de l'Image Sous-Marine, Antibes, France
- 2002 - Plongeur d'Or, Festival Mondial de l'Image Sous-Marine, Antibes, France
- 2004 - Plongeur d'Or, Festival Mondial de l'Image Sous-Marine, Antibes, France
- 2013 - Hans Hass Award « en reconnaissance de la contribution apportée au savoir de nos océans »
- 2014 - Membre de l' Ocean Artist Society, USA
- 2016 - Docteur « Honoris Causa » Liège University, Belgique
- 2017 - Tridente d'Oro, Accademia Internazionale di Scienze e Tecnica Subacquea, Italie
- 2017 - Diver of the Year, Beneath the Sea Diveshow, USA
- 2017 - Wildlife photographer of the year - Earth's environment category
- 2017 - Chevalier de l'Ordre National du Mérite

Au royaume du nautille

2010 - Prix Alain Estève du festival international du film d'aventures de Val-d'Isère

Le septième Ciel des requins gris

- 2006 - Prix spécial du jury FIFO - Festival International du Documentaire Océanien
- 2006 - Grand prix du public FIFO - Festival International du Documentaire Océanien
- 2006 - Grand Prix du documentaire animalier, Golden Dolphin (Festival International de Moscou)

The coelacanth, a dive toward our origins

- 2013 - Prix Méditerranée d'Or, Festival International Image Sous-Marine et Aventure, Antibes
- 2014 - Ancre d'Or, Festival International du film Maritime, d'Exploration et d'Environnement, Toulon
- 2014 - Prix Abyss d'Or, Festival Abyss, Ajaccio
- 2014 - Prix Buffon et prix du public, Festival Pariscience, Paris

The grouper mystery

- 2015 - Grand prix du festival international du film d'aventure de la Rochelle
- 2015 - Médaille d'Or, Fête Européenne de l'Image Sous Marine, Strasbourg
- 2016 - Best Documentary, Film Festival d'Ouchy, Suisse

Antarctica, on the footsteps of the emperor penguin

- 2017 - Grand prix du festival international du film d'aventure de la Rochelle
- 2017 - Prix du public du festival international du film d'aventure de la Rochelle
- 2017 - Prix Alain Estève du festival international du film d'aventures de Val-d'Isère
- 2017 - Best ecosystem film au Jackson Hole Wildlife film festival

- BOOKS

- 2003 - *De la source à la mer*, ed. SVI Puplicep
2005 - *Planète Mers*, ed. Michel Lafon
2006 - *Planet Ocean*, ed. National Geographic (traduit en 5 langues)
2007 - *Plongées sans bulles*, ed. SVI Puplicep
2008 - *Secrets de Méditerranée*, 1ère édition limitée ed. Andromède Collection
2010 - *Secrets de Méditerranée*, 2ème édition limitée ed. Andromède Collection
2012 - *Odyssée dans les eaux d'ici*, ed. Andromède Collection
2013 - *Une vie dans le port*, ed. Andromède Collection
2014 - *Gombessa, rencontre avec le coelacanth*, ed. Andromède Collection
2015 - *Gombessa, meeting with the coelacanth*, co-ed. Andromède Collection/OceanPlanet
2015 - *Secrets d'Oceans*, édition limitée, ed. Andromède Collection
2016 - *Adélie, Terre & Mer*, co-ed Paulsen / Koballan
2018 - *700 Sharks into the dark*, ed. Andromède Collection



- FILMOGRAPHY

- 2002 - **Les jardins d'Aqaba**
ecosystems of the marine parc of Aqaba
- 2004 - **Le 7ème ciel des requins gris**
world first images of grey sharks mating, never filmed since then
- 2007 - **Dans les profondeurs de la Baie des Anges**
explorations and photographs at 655 ft in French Mediterranean sea
- 2008 - **Au royaume du Nautil**
observing the nautilus at -360 ft and photographs of undescribed species
- 2010 - **Ushuaia, l'aventure du coelacanth dans le canal du Mozambique**
world first photographs and film of the coelacanth done by divers at -395 ft
- 2011 - **Les larmes du crocodile**
diving with the Nil crocodile in the delta of Okavango
- 2013 - **The coelacanth, a dive toward our origins**
very first scientific studies on a living coelacanth by divers - 395 ft
[trailer](#)
- 2015 - **The grouper mystery**
unique images of groupers' mating and a record dive of 24 hours at -66 ft
[trailer](#)
- 2017 - **Antarctica, on the footsteps of the emperor penguin**
the longest and deepest dives ever performed in polar regions
[trailer](#)
- 2018 - **700 Sharks into the dark**
3000 hour of diving cumulated over 4 years of expedition to study the hunts of the grey sharks at night

- BIO

Laurent Ballesta is a naturalist photographer. He graduated from a Master in Marine Biology and Ecology. At 23, he completed his studies in **discovering a new species of fish to the western Mediterranean, the Andromeda Goby, *Didogobius schlieveni*.**

He is the **youngest photographer to be awarded with the « Plongeur d'Or »** (Gold Diver) at the « Festival International de l'Image Sous Marine » in Antibes. And the only one to have obtained it three times. He has published portfolios in **major magazines of French and foreign press** (Science, National Geographic, GQ, Paris-Match, Figaro Magazine, VSD, Ça m'intéresse, Daily Mail, Stern, View, Corriere Magazine, Terres Sauvages, Sciences & Vie, etc.) and in August 2009, he celebrated his 100th page in Paris Match. Today he has nearly 150, a record for underwater photography for such a broad and popular magazine.

Being a professional diver, **he was a precursor in using since 1999 a new kind of diving equipment, an electronically controlled mixing closed circuit rebreather**, which offers revolutionary perspectives in underwater exploration as the dives are much deeper, last much longer and the diver is more silent and discreet.

In 2000 he founded with Pierre Descamp his friend from University the NGO L'Oeil d'Andromède, **aimed to reconcile oceanology studies with artistic highlight of marine wildlife and environment**. This partnership will lead to the creation of the company **Andromède Océanologie** in 2008.

In 2006 the **Senate of the French Republic** pays tribute to his work with the exhibition « **Planet Ocean** ». This makes him the youngest photographer to have exhibited his work on the famous gates of the **Jardin du Luxembourg in Paris**. **Twenty exhibitions around the world** will follow.

In 2008, he took the **deepest image in the world** ever photographed by a diver **at - 625 ft**, by the French Riviera.

With this knowledge in deep diving, he led in May 2009, a confidential expedition to South Africa to realize an old dream, diving with Gombessa (the local name of the coelacanth fish) and bring back the **very first pictures of the living fossile fish taken by a diver, down at - 395 ft**.

This mission led to his first « **GOMBESSA Expedition** », 4 years later, to conduct the **first scientific protocols on a live specimen, down at - 120 m/ 395 ft**.

In January 2014, Laurent published his book Gombessa, meeting with the coelacanth, the **only photographic collection about the Coelacanth**. He presents his best images, the images of the mythical fish and its environment; and tells the story and the twists of an adventure that lasted five years. One year later the English version of the book Gombessa was published with a foreword of David Doubilet.

Laurent has led 4 GOMBESSA Expeditions : the study of the deep coelacanth in South Africa, the mating of the groupers in the south pass of Fakarava in French Polynesia, the grey sharks hunts at night in that same channel, and the exploration of the deep ecosystems of Antarctica. Every new mission is in the lineage of the previous ones, and strengthens the three pillars of all Gombessa expeditions: **a scientific mystery, a diving challenge and the promise of unprecedented animal images**.



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- LINKS TO FILMS

The coelacanth, a dive toward our origins 90'

<https://vimeo.com/181182812>

password : cœlacanthe

The grouper mystery 52'

<https://vimeo.com/155361041>

password : GRPRMSTRY

GOMBESSA IV, Genesis 26'

<https://vimeo.com/255038788>

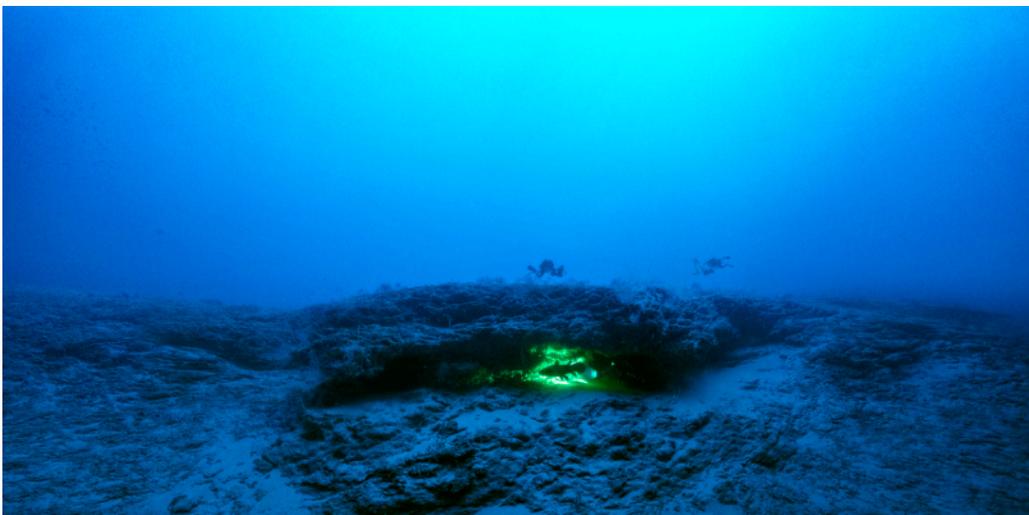
password : GNSS26

- PRESS SELECTION

- April 2014 - [Paris Match](#)
- October 2016 - [Le Temps](#)
- December 2016 - [Paris Match](#)
- July 2017 - [National Geographic USA](#)
- January 2017 - [Le Parisien](#)
- May 2017 - [Libération](#)
- May 2017 - [GEO](#)
- September 2017 - [Le Parisien](#)
- November 2017 - [Le Point](#)
- January 2018 - [L'équipe Magazine](#)
- January 2018 - [Midi Libre](#)



GOMBESSA I - Meeting with the coelacanth in South Africa



GOMBESSA II - Groupers' mating in Fakarava

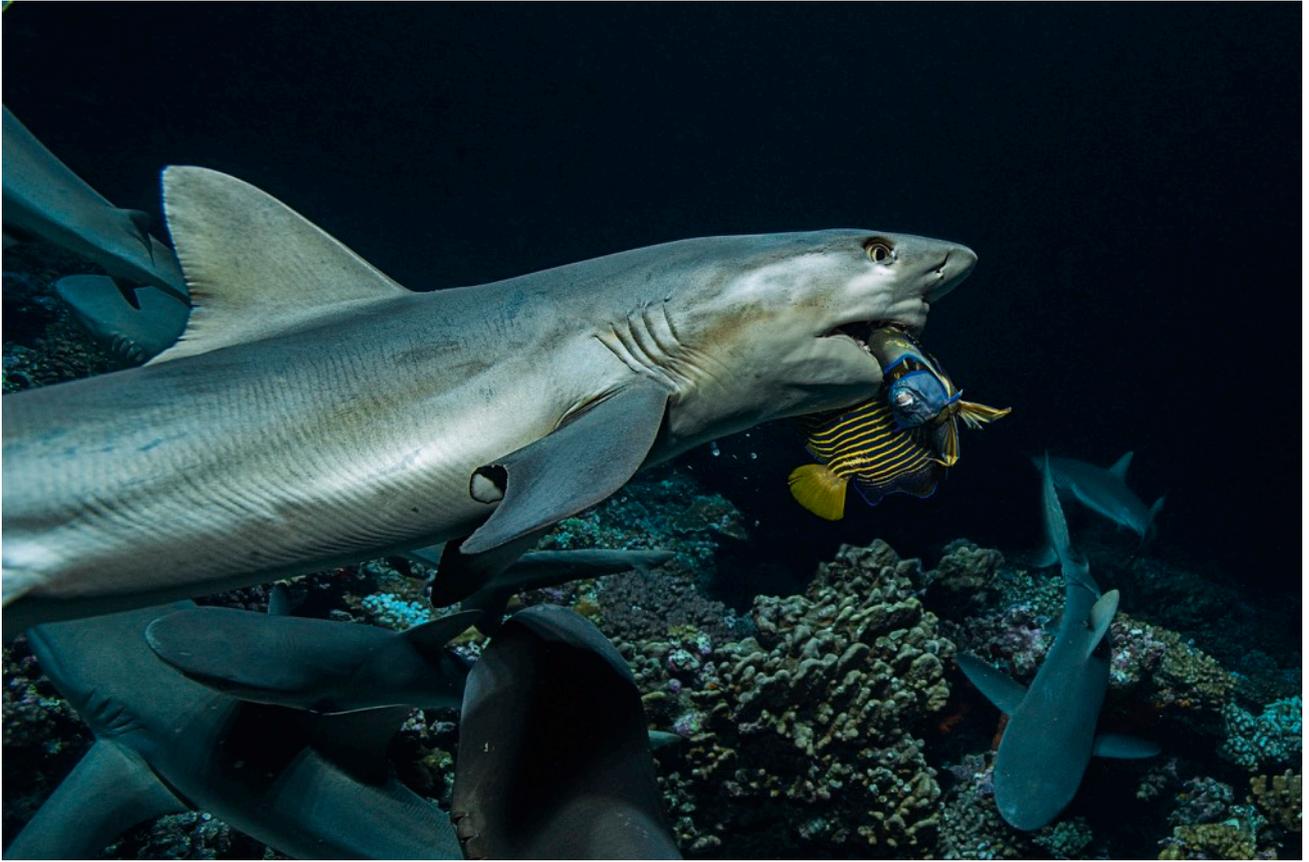


GOMBESSA III - Deep ecosystems of Antarctica



GOMBESSA IV - Feeding frenzies of the grey sharks in Fakarava







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1735
BLANCPAIN
MANUFACTURE DE HAUTE HORLOGERIE



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