



**Embargoed Information until Saturday, 7th September, at 00:01**

## **Oceano Azul Expedition Gorringe**

**Oceano Azul Foundation, Oceanário de Lisboa, ICNF – Institute for Nature Conservation and Forests, and the Portuguese Navy are undertaking an expedition to the Gorringe Seamount, the highest mountain in Western Europe.**

**From September 7 to 28, 26 scientists will gather scientific data to support the implementation of protection measures for this unique biodiversity hotspot.**

The **Oceano Azul Expedition Gorringe** will cover the area of this seamount, which is 220 km long and 80 km wide, located within Portugal's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Rising approximately 5.000 metres, it is the **tallest mountain in Western Europe**. Onboard the historic **vessel Santa Maria Manuela** and two sailboats, **26 scientists** will conduct research from Saturday, September 7 to September 28.

This initiative arises from the pressing need to understand and safeguard Portugal's natural heritage, aligning with national, European, and international policies for the protection and sustainable management of the ocean. **The expedition is promoted by Oceano Azul Foundation, Oceanário de Lisboa, and the Portuguese Government, through the Ministry of Environment and Energy and the ICNF – Institute for Nature Conservation and Forests, as well as the Portuguese Navy.** It benefits from institutional support from the Environmental Fund, the National Maritime Authority, OCEANA, National Geographic Pristine Seas, and the WAITT Institute, and includes vital partnerships with scientific institutions such as the Portuguese Hydrographic Institute, CCMAR – University of Algarve, CESAM –

University of Aveiro, CIBIO – University of Porto, MARE – Polytechnic Institute of Leiria, Okeanos - University of the Azores, SPEA, AIMM, Vasco da Gama Aquarium, Moss Landing Marine Laboratories - San Jose State University, the Marine Futures Lab - University of Western Australia, and the Laboratory of Applied Bioacoustics - Polytechnic University of Catalonia.

This expedition will **consolidate and expand scientific knowledge** about this Atlantic oasis, collecting crucial scientific data to support the management of this significant area of the Natura 2000 Network and its establishment as a Marine Protected Area, accelerating Portugal's achievement of the 30x30 target.

Located 200 kilometres off Ponta de Sagres, in southwest mainland Portugal, the Goringe Seamount is considered a conservation priority in Europe due to its exceptional biological richness. The seamount hosts a variety of habitats, ranging from kelp forests near the surface to the deep sea, where cold-water coral gardens and sponge fields thrive. It acts as a magnet for marine life in the Atlantic, attracting large schools of fish, and forms part of the migratory routes for marine mammals such as whales and dolphins, as well as turtles. Previous studies have documented the area's uniqueness and ecological value, identifying around 850 species, including threatened ones, while also highlighting its vulnerability.

This expedition will bring together a team of national and international researchers, employing a wide range of scientific methodologies and technologies to assess the state of marine conservation and produce a scientific report summarising the biological and ecological significance of this

critical ocean conservation area. The results will provide recommendations for conservation and management measures to be implemented in this oceanic oasis.

Over three weeks, the scientific expedition, led by Emanuel Gonçalves, scientific coordinator and board member of Oceano Azul Foundation, and Henrique Cabral, biologist and researcher at the *Institut National de Recherche pour l'Agriculture, l'Alimentation et l'Environnement (INRAE)* in France, will collect samples and images to characterise the biodiversity and marine habitats of the region.

Using scientific diving and various technologies such as drones, baited remote underwater video systems (BRUVs), video landers, and a remotely operated vehicle (ROV), **researchers will access areas that have remained largely unexplored, filling crucial knowledge gaps**. Additional research will be conducted in bioacoustics and seabed mapping in collaboration with the Portuguese Navy's Hydrographic Institute.

The data and images collected will culminate in a scientific report diagnosing the ecological value and health of this Portuguese seamount. This information will help facilitate the adoption of optimal management measures to protect and enhance Portugal's blue natural capital. Beyond the scientific report, a documentary will also be produced to showcase the richness of this underwater heritage to the Portuguese public.



## About Oceano Azul Foundation

Oceano Azul Foundation is an international foundation based in Portugal, established in 2017. Operating under the motto ***From the ocean's point of view***, its mission is to contribute to a healthy and productive ocean for the benefit of all life on the planet. Guided by science, the Foundation works to **protect, develop, and enhance Blue Natural Capital**, focusing on key areas such as **Ocean Conservation, International Ocean Advocacy**, and the **Blue Economy**. The Foundation also prioritises Ocean Literacy and Education and empowers civil society. Its change model enables the development of projects centred on Marine Protected Areas and sustainable fisheries while also advising governments and decision-makers to advance the international ocean agenda, working with other foundations, civil society organisations, the UN, and the EU. The Foundation also runs communication campaigns to amplify its impact by raising awareness of the importance of protecting and restoring the ocean.

## About ICNF

The Institute for Nature Conservation and Forests (ICNF) is a public body under the indirect administration of the State. It serves as the National Authority for Nature Conservation and the National Forestry Authority. ICNF manages the country's natural and forestry heritage, involving territorial development stakeholders in conservation measures and forest management actions.

## About the Portuguese Navy

The Portuguese Navy is a branch of the Armed Forces with administrative autonomy, integrated into the State Administration through the Ministry of National Defence.

Its mission is "to promote and protect Portugal's interests in and through the sea" via three key functions related to Defence, Security and Authority, and Development, enabling Portugal to ensure the free, sustainable, and equitable use of the sea.

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