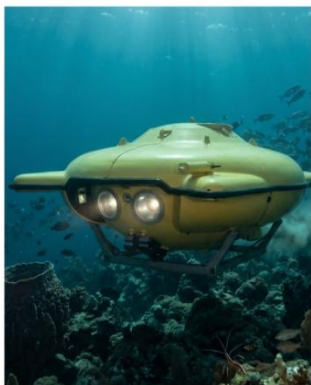




June 2026

Jacques Cousteau: The Man Who Gave the Oceans a Voice



"The sea, once it casts its spell, holds one in its net of wonder forever." -Jacques Cousteau

Jacques Cousteau - Explorer • Inventor • Filmmaker • Educator • Storyteller • Oceanographer • Environmental Advocate • Conservation Pioneer • Visionary • Champion of the Seas... And one of my all-time heroes.

Jacques Cousteau was **born on June 11, 1910**, in Saint-André-de-Cubzac, France, and **died on June 25, 1997**, in Paris. He served as a French naval officer before becoming one of the world's most celebrated ocean explorers and filmmakers.

Cousteau was a true "Renaissance Man."

Consider the breadth of his contributions:

- **Inventor** — Co-developed the Aqua-Lung, which transformed underwater exploration.
- **Explorer** — Led expeditions across the world's oceans aboard the Calypso.
- **Scientist** — Conducted and promoted oceanographic research.
- **Filmmaker** — Produced award-winning underwater documentaries.
- **Photographer and Cinematographer** — Helped pioneer techniques for filming beneath the sea.
- **Author** — Wrote numerous books that brought the ocean to the general public.
- **Educator** — Introduced millions to marine ecosystems through television and film.
- **Environmental Advocate** — Became one of the world's most recognizable voices for ocean conservation.
- **Leader and Entrepreneur** — Built organizations, research programs, and global conservation initiatives.
- **Storyteller** — Perhaps his greatest gift was making people care about places they would never personally visit.

Cousteau helped invent **the diving saucer** — a small, easily maneuverable submarine for seafloor exploration — in 1959, along with a number of specialized underwater cameras.

Conshelf I (Continental Shelf Station One), also known as *Diogenes*, was his pioneering 1962 underwater habitat experiment.. Located off the coast of Marseille, France, it proved that humans could live and work on the ocean floor for extended periods.

Cousteau leased a former British minesweeper, converting it into an oceanographic research vessel he named **Calypso**.

Recognizing that attracting media attention could help people understand why his work mattered, he published his landmark book *The Silent World* in 1953, which was later made into a film that won at the Cannes Film Festival.

He filmed and produced over 150 television documentaries and more than fifty books. With documentaries such as *The Silent World* and *The Undersea World of Jacques Cousteau*, **he changed how people perceived the ocean** and brought an unknown world into the living rooms of millions.

His films won the grand prize at Venice, Cannes, and Paris, as well as three Academy Awards.

Cousteau was awarded the U.S. Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1985 and was admitted to the French *Académie française*. While using underwater filming devices, **he not only recorded the lives of sea creatures but explained why they needed to be saved.**

Cousteau wasn't just an enchanter — he was a witness and a warner. He sounded the alarm on overfishing, pollution, and the degradation of marine ecosystems long before they became mainstream concerns. In a landmark 1970 announcement, his extensive research, conducted over two decades of voyages, revealed a staggering 40 percent decrease in marine biodiversity, which he attributed to pollution, overfishing, and human interference.

In 1991, the United Nations named Cousteau a "**Messenger of Peace**," a title he held until his death in 1997. His work bridged the gap between scientific discovery and public engagement, making the ocean a focal point of global environmental awareness. His son Jean-Michel carried the work forward, and **The Cousteau Society** continues its mission.

"For most of history, man has had to fight nature to survive; in this century he is beginning to realize that, in order to survive, he must protect it." -Jacques Cousteau, November 1991

Note: I grew up watching Cousteau's TV documentaries and reading his features in National Geographic.

Cousteau taught me to love the sea and all of its creatures. I thought of him every time I scuba dived off of Guam (My second USAF assignment). Coral reefs and multi-colored fish. Octopi and Cuttle fish. Sea turtles. Morays. Coral polyps. Pink sea anemones and their clown fish. Miter shell animals carrying their homes with them as they scurried across a sandy sea bottom at night.

As his expeditions and videos and stories went out into the world – and invited others to join him, at least in their thoughts and imaginations – so the story of a conservation supporter who made a planned gift can inspire other supporters to think about doing the same.



[Clint Wilkinson](#)

I help wildlife conservation nonprofits grow planned giving - by inspiring additional supporters to leave a legacy gift for conservation.

Development Directors of Wildlife Conservation Organizations:

Your best supporters will one day
consider making a planned gift...
I help you remove the barriers...
by telling the right stories.

