



WWF

FACTSHEET

2011



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Freshwater

THE STURGEONS

Danube's endangered flagship species

Until the 19th century, giant sturgeons migrated from the Black Sea up the Danube as far as Germany and were important mainstays for many fishing communities. Today, this ancient fish is on the brink of extinction.

Why should we protect sturgeons?

- Originating 200 million years ago, sturgeons have outlasted the dinosaurs.
- Danube sturgeons get up to 6 meters long and live to be 100 years old.
- Danube sturgeons live mostly in the Black Sea, migrating up the Danube to spawn - in former days as far as Germany, but today only 800 km up-stream where they are halted by the Iron Gates dams.
- Sturgeons have high economic value as they produce caviar, the luxury roe.
- Sturgeons play an important role as indicators of healthy ecosystems.

Danube sturgeons are in danger of becoming extinct, with five of the six native species Critically Endangered (IUCN, 2009).

WHY ARE STURGEON POPULATIONS DECLINING?

The Action Plan for the conservation of sturgeons in the Danube River Basin identifies three key reasons for the dramatic decline of sturgeons over the past few decades.

- Over-exploitation.
- Habitat loss and degradation.
- Disruption of spawning migration.

Sturgeon species native to the Danube River Basin:



FIVE OUT OF THE SIX NATIVE SPECIES OF DANUBE STURGEON ARE CRITICALLY ENDANGERED

- **Huso huso** (Beluga) is extremely rare and Critically Endangered according to IUCN (2009). It is the source of the highly sought after, and valuable, Beluga caviar.
- **Acipenser gueldenstaedtii** (Russian Sturgeon) is extremely rare and Critically Endangered (IUCN,2009).
- **Acipenser stellatus** (Stellate Sturgeon) is also extremely rare and Critically Endangered (IUCN, 2009).
- **Acipenser nudiventris** (Ship

Sturgeon) is Critically Endangered (IUCN, 2009) and close to extinction. Its current status in the Danube River Basin is unclear.

- **Acipenser ruthenus** (Sterlet), which lives exclusively in freshwater, is considered Vulnerable (IUCN,2009) and its survival in the Danube is only maintained through stocking programmes.
- **Acipenser sturio** (Atlantic Sturgeon) is Critically Endangered (IUCN, 2009) and is probably already extinct in the Danube River Basin.

WHAT MEASURES SHOULD WE TAKE?




Following the creation of the Action Plan for the conservation of sturgeons in the Danube River Basin, WWF works to endorse all necessary measures to ensure the survival of Danube sturgeons.

- Reduce the pressure on sturgeon populations by supporting fishing bans and at least the reduction of catch quotas.
- Cease illegal sturgeon fishing and illegal caviar trade.
- Make the Iron Gates dams passable to sturgeons.
- Conduct research into key sturgeon habitats, behaviour and stocks.
- Implement restocking programmes.
- Harmonise international legislation.

WWF'S VISION

CREATE CONDITIONS FOR VIABLE POPULATIONS OF DANUBE STURGEONS BY HALTING ILLEGAL FISHING, SECURING CRITICAL SPAWNING HABITATS AND RESTORING MIGRATION ROUTES.



Why we are here
 To stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.
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