

Sturgeon 2020

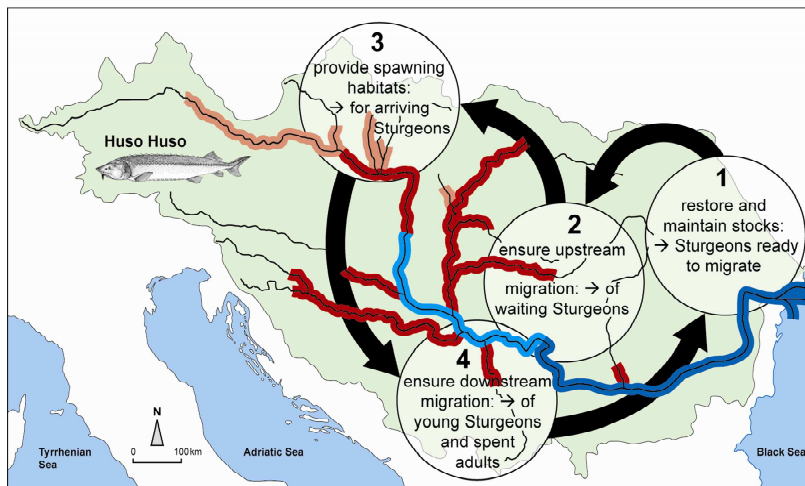
Sturgeons are “living fossils” and well known for their specific biological traits including long distance spawning migrations and their caviar as luxury food. They are threatened to extinction worldwide due to human impacts on populations by overexploitation, disruption of migration and alteration of habitats. In the Danube River, the medium and long distance migratory sturgeon species are integral part of numerous traditional activities in the different cultures for centuries. They are flag-ship species and excellent indicators for the ecological status of the Danube.

Currently one out of six native Danube sturgeon species is considered extinct and all others are either close to extinction or show signs of population destabilization and decline. The figure shows for example the distribution and life cycle of the Beluga sturgeon (*Huso huso*), with dark blue = present regular occurrence, light blue = present occasional occurrence, dark red = past regular occurrence, and light red = past occasional occurrence (redrawn from Reinartz (2002)).

Action Plan for the Conservation of Sturgeons (Acipenseridae) in the Danube River Basin

Aim: to close the natural Sturgeon life-cycle

→ **needs joint and simultaneous actions in the Upper, Middle and Lower Danube**



The Danube sturgeon conservation became a main research topic of IAD in 2000. A first output was the **literature study of Reinartz (2002)**. Based on this study, IAD together with WWF, was involved in elaborating the "**Action Plan for the conservation of sturgeons (Acipenseridae) in the Danube River Basin**" (SAP, Bloesch et al. 2006), a legally binding document from 2005 under the Bern Convention, signed by all Danube countries.

IAD developed and scientifically accompanied international projects such as the Danube-ReConnect (SEE-TCP) and LinkStur (LIFE+ / Danubeparks) proposals in 2008 and 2011. Since 2006 and in cooperation with the ICPDR, one of the main activities was and still is to initiate, a **feasibility study on making the Iron Gate dams passable for sturgeons** and other fish species, which is one of the SAP measures of highest priority.

In January 2012, in the framework provided by the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (Priority Areas 4 and 6), a **Danube Sturgeon Task Force** including all relevant stakeholders was established to reactivate SAP implementation and to find means of coordinating and fostering the

conservation of native sturgeon species in the Danube River Basin (DRB) and the adjacent Black Sea. A **state-of-the-art of Danube Sturgeon conservation** with a quotation of recent publications is provided in Reinartz et al. (2012). The following concrete and immediate measures in a “Sturgeon 2020 Programme” are proposed for the further implementation of the SAP:

- a well coordinated transboundary research plan and population monitoring (road map) by leading organizations and institutes with focus on sturgeon stock status, habitat, migration, genetics and the establishment of competence centres for fish and fisheries (including sturgeons);
- supporting and coordinated PR actions (raising public awareness and participation, fundraising for sturgeon projects) by authorities and NGOs (e.g. WWF and IAD);
- continuous and intensified pro-active support of ICPDR and EUSDR to promote sturgeon policy, management and legislation; this includes, amongst others, the enforcement of migration aids at the Iron Gates and Gabčíkovo dams and an increased cooperation with CITES (Convention on International Trade with Endangered Species) / TRAFFIC (the Wildlife Trade Monitoring Network) / FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations) to positively influence the socio-economic aspects of sturgeon conservation and to ensure a sound basis for coordinated ex situ conservation measures.

TAKE CARE OF THE STURGEONS (young Beluga – Photo: Radu Suciu)



References

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