



Saving Danube Sturgeons – a WWF priority in Europe

**Joint actions to raise awareness on overexploitation
of Danube sturgeons in Romania and Bulgaria –
LIFE11INF/AT/000902**

Cristina Munteanu – WWF Romania, 10-12 September 2014





WWF DCP Goal

By 2025, viable populations of Danube sturgeons exist in the Danube River.

Threats

- Poaching (due to high economic value of caviar)
- Dams (e.g Iron Gates)
- Habitat loss (Straightening and channelization of River, sand and gravel extraction, bottom trawling)



LIFE+ project scope

Contribute to protection and secure the long term survival of Danube sturgeons in Europe

Objectives

- Reducing sturgeon illegal fishing in 15 targeted fishing communities in Bulgaria and Romania;
- Stronger enforcement and political support for the protection of Danube sturgeons;
- Target groups show at least 50% increased awareness and knowledge of overexploitation of sturgeons and 80% demonstrate change of attitude towards better protection of sturgeons.



Partners	Target groups
WWF Austria - Beneficiary	Enforcement agencies
WWF Bulgaria	Fishermen communities
WWF Romania	Sturgeon farms/Caviar traders
	Decision makers
	Broader public



Project location





Activities

Preparatory actions – awareness and knowledge of project target groups and broader public and compilation of existing information

Communication actions with all target groups - brochures, information boards, factsheets, movie about sturgeons, TV spot, field visits including discussions with fishermen, trainings and workshop for enforcement agencies

Press activities: conferences, articles, field trips

Dissemination of project results: Website: <http://sturioni.wwf.ro>, project synthesis and long-term strategy



Expected results

- *By June 2013, Sturgeon Advocates are established in both countries and are recognized as liaison persons and information sources regarding sturgeon issues by at least 300 fishermen in 15 targeted villages.*
- *By October 2014, at least 150 targeted fishermen are aware of alternatives to substitute income from illegal sturgeon fishing*
- *By December 2013, 2 workshops (for at least 100 officials in total) and 4 special sessions providing training on the job (for at least 10 officials each) are held for competent enforcement authorities in Bulgaria and Romania.*
- *By the end of the project, first time seizures of illegal sturgeon caviar in Bulgaria and Romania and imposed sanctions to deter further poaching and illegal trade show higher enforcement effectiveness and improved conservation of wild sturgeons.*
- *By April 2015, a joint declaration is signed by at least 7 high level decision makers from Danube States, expressing clear political support for the protection of sturgeons.*

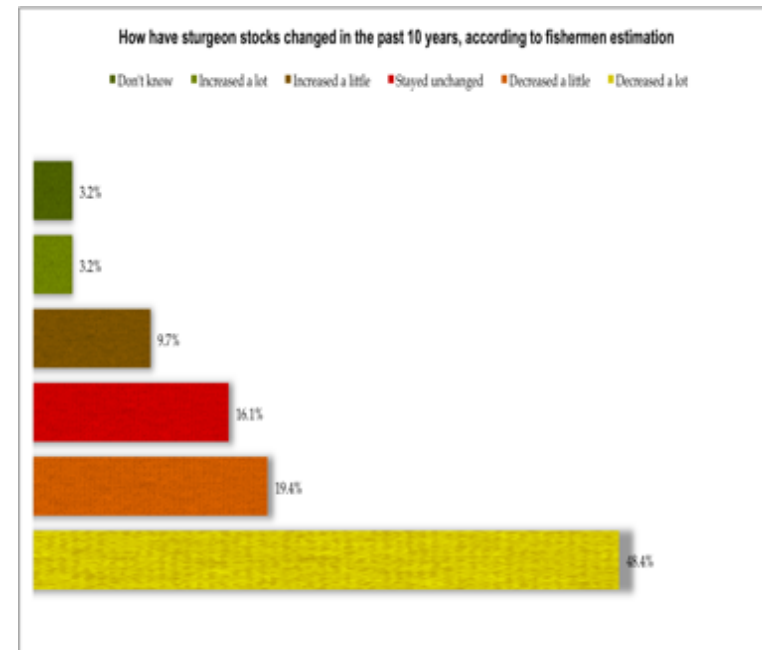
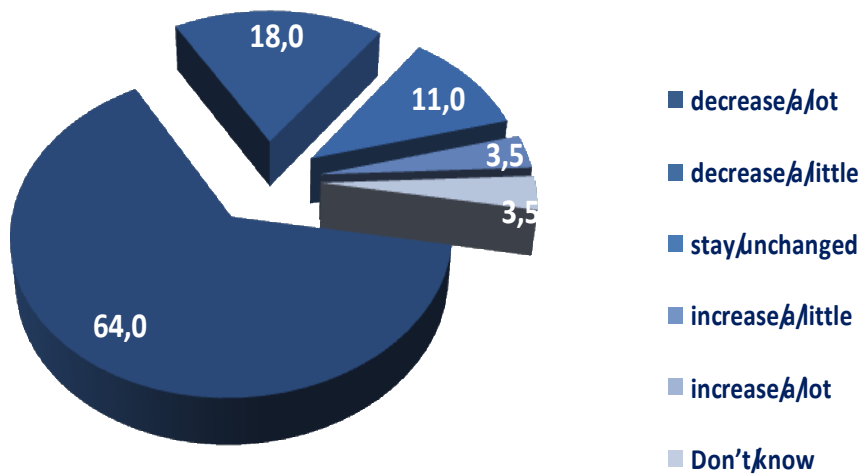


Baseline evaluation for target groups

- Interviews based on questionnaires from October 2012 to February 2013
- 9 localities visited in Romania and 13 in Bulgaria
- 59 questionnaires with fishermen realised 31 in Romania and 28 in Bulgaria but free discussions with more than 100 fishermen
- 28 questionnaires with representatives of enforcement agencies (NAFA, Border Police, Transport Police, Environmental Guard, Custom) – 22 in Romania and 6 in Bulgaria
- 6 questionnaires with decision makers and 4 with companies that breed sturgeons or trade/process/export caviar in Romania
- 500 respondents from broader public in each country

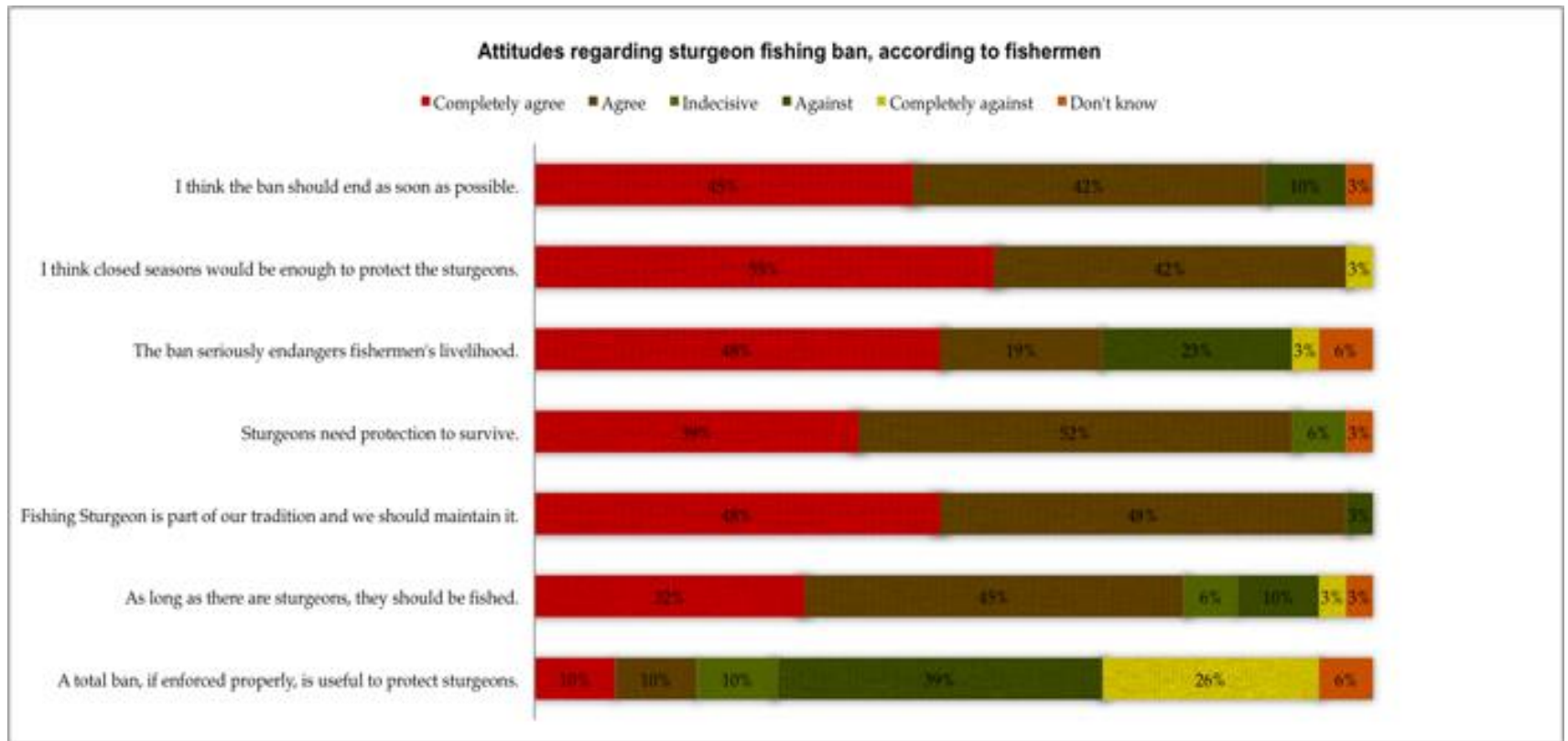


Fishermen perception regarding stocks evolution



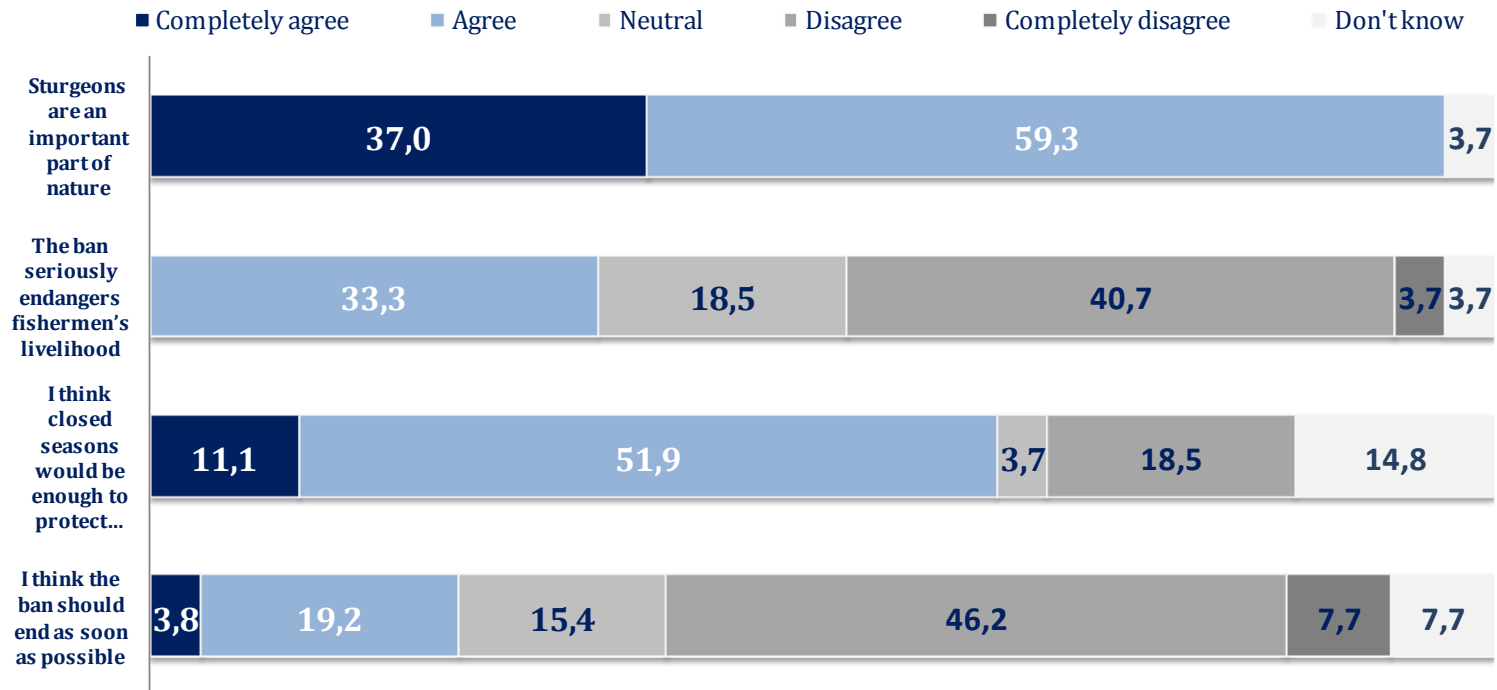


Attitude towards the ban in Romania





Attitude towards the ban in Bulgaria



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Information boards

AJUTĂM POPULAȚIILE DE STURIONI DIN DUNĂRE SĂ SE REFACĂ
 HELPING DANUBE STURGEONS TO RECOVER



CONTEMPORANI CÂNDVA CU DINOSAURII, ASTĂZI STURIONII SUNT AMENINȚAȚI CU DISPARIȚIA
 AS ANCEST OF THE DINOSAURS, TODAY'S STURGEONS ARE AT RISK OF EXTINCTION

Sturionii din Dunăre trăiesc în cea mai mică parte a timpului în Marea Neagră, migrați în toată Dunărea doar pentru a se reproducere. Într-un an, un sturion poate să trăiască și 100 de ani. Cu înălțimi de până la un metru și jumătate și o greutate de până la 200 kg, sturionii sunt pești unici și foarte valoroși. Populațiile lor sunt în scădere din cauza pierderii habitatului și a pescuitului excesiv. În România și Bulgaria, sturionii sunt pești unici și foarte valoroși.

PESCUITUL EXCESIV, CÂNDVA LEGAL, DAR ÎN PREZENT ILEGAL, ESTE PRINCIPALA AMENINȚARE DIRECTĂ LA ADRESA SUPRAVIEȚIRII STURIONILOR DIN DUNĂRE
 OVERFISHING IS THE MAIN DIRECT THREAT TO THE SURVIVAL OF DANUBE STURGEONS

Deși este permisă și comercializată în România și Bulgaria, pescuitul excesiv este o amenințare directă la adresa supraviețuirii sturionilor din Dunăre. În prezent, pescuitul este ilegal în toată țara. În România și Bulgaria, sturionii sunt pești unici și foarte valoroși. Populațiile lor sunt în scădere din cauza pierderii habitatului și a pescuitului excesiv. În România și Bulgaria, sturionii sunt pești unici și foarte valoroși.

Proiectul "Ajutăm populațiile de sturioni din Dunăre să se refacă" este implementat de WWF în România și Bulgaria, în perioada iulie 2012 - septembrie 2015. Proiectul este finanțat în egală măsură de către Uniunea Europeană și WWF.

sturioni.wwf.ro



Sturgeon advocate visits

- 3 visits in all the villages already performed



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Information materials

➤ 4 factsheets on project, sturgeons biology, caviar and threats in EN, RO and BG

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Conservation

The biology of Danube sturgeons



Sturgeons originated about 200 million years ago and have undergone little morphological change, making them "living fossils". They also show a long generation interval, late start of sexual maturation, late age at first spawning, and high resistance to natural predators. The 10 members of the Danube sturgeon are confined to the Danube drainage, including rivers, lakes and coastal waters in Europe, Asia and America.

Sturgeons are distinctive for their elongated bodies, rounded snout and lack of scales. They lack scales but have bony scutes along the body. Sturgeons are cold water fish and spend most of their lives in the river.

LITTLE IS KNOWN ABOUT STURGEONS HABITS IN THE DANUBE

Migrating up the Danube

Four of the six sturgeon species native to the Danube basin used to live in the Black Sea and later the Danube Estuary. In the past, Russian Sturgeons, Atlantic Sturgeons, European Sturgeons (two subspecies) and the Caspian Sturgeon regularly migrated upstream, some for 4,000 km and beyond. However, this migration has been interrupted for a long time. Some started by Serbia and Romania. Today, the migration of these species can be observed only in the Lower Danube. The reason, on the other hand, is a poor freshwater regime and small quantities of spawning fish. Sturgeons remain to be assessed and the Danube basin.

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Conservation

The caviar trade



Caviar is considered a luxury and the market is one of the most expensive wildlife products. According to trade statistics, the European Union (EU), the USA and Switzerland are the largest importers of caviar globally with fish imports and exports in legal international trade between small and medium. Among the EU Member States, France and Germany are the largest importers. Romania and Bulgaria were significant exporters of caviar from wild sturgeon and still hold the only major wild sturgeon caviar processing and export facilities in the EU.

The demand for caviar has led to overexploitation and overfishing in the Danube basin of sturgeon worldwide. In order to ensure the survival of the species and to achieve sustainability, to catch all sturgeon species were listed under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). Today, all caviar in international trade (except imports and exports used for scientific purposes) must be accompanied by CITES documents and international trade must have special CITES labels.

The basis for caviar has shifted to the production of illegal caviar trade. Caviar is a mixture of illegal and other processed natural populations in the EU.

ALL CAVIAR MUST HAVE CITES LABELS

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Conservation

The threats to Danube sturgeons



Overhunting and overfishing have significantly reduced the number of Danube sturgeons. The Danube River basin represents one of the most important sturgeon populations in the world, with Romania and Bulgaria holding the only viable populations of wild sturgeons in the European Union. However, sturgeons that are overexploited and overfished are at risk of extinction. This has resulted in the Black Sea, migrating up the Danube to spawn. They get up to 6 meters long and live for 100 years old.

Illegal fishing - primarily for their caviar - is the main threat to the survival of Danube sturgeons. Financed by the EU, USA and Germany, WWF works to build the Danube sturgeon fish and caviar trade. WWF is working to prevent.

5 OUT OF 6 STURGEON SPECIES IN THE DANUBE ARE CRITICALLY ENDANGERED

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Conservation

Halting overexploitation of Danube sturgeons



About the project

The biology of Danube sturgeons, the ancient organisms that are today surviving on the brink of extinction due to overfishing, is largely unknown. The project will address this knowledge gap by conducting research in Romania and Bulgaria.

Financed by the EU, USA and Germany, the project is implemented by WWF in Romania and Bulgaria. WWF aims to reduce the illegal trade in the species' natural habitat.

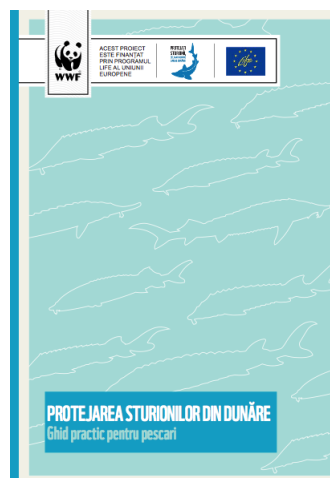
Project target groups are fishing communities, law enforcement agencies, business leaders, sturgeon breeders and water governance and traders in Romania and Bulgaria.

ARE THE MOST THREATENED ANIMALS IN THE DANUBE BASIN BY THREATENED SPECIES



Information materials

- 3 booklets:
 - one for enforcers, one for fishermen in RO and BG
 - one for companies in EN (this month also in RO and BG)





Information materials

➤ Gadgets:

- Measuring tapes
- Caps
- Raincoats
- Pins





Workshops, trainings, round tables, press conferences

- 2 press conferences in RO and BG -
- 2 workshops with enforcers in RO and BG
- 2 trainings with enforcers in RO and BG
- 2 Round tables in RO and BG



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Navigation projects

- 2 navigation projects for Lower Danube
- Calarasi – Braila project – Bala bottom sill stopped, technical solution under revision





Illegal caviar tradins

- **Beluga – European or Great Sturgeon,**
Mohammed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund
 - Undercover survey

Country	No. of sites visited	No. of sites selling alleged caviar	No. of samples purchased	Price range per gram in Euros	Species of origin indicated by DNA testing	CITES label visible?	Where label not present, did vendor indicate wild?	Where label visible, did the species code correlate with DNA testing?
Romania	38	15	14	0.30 – 4.00	Restaurants (5)	Yes (3)	N.R.	Yes (1)
					Individual vendors (3)			DNA results inconclusive (1)
					Shops (3)	No (11)		Unknown (1) [†]
					Market stalls (3)			No results from DNA analysis (3)
Bulgaria	41	14	14	0.10 – 2.67	Restaurants (2)	Yes (10)	N.R.	Yes (8)
					Sturgeon Farms (4)			Sturgeon (11)
					Shops (8)	Not sturgeon caviar (1, from a restaurant) [†]		No (4)
Austria	1	1	2	3.14 – 4.20	Shop (2)	Yes (2)	N.R.	DNA results inconclusive, but probably no (1) ^{††}
								No (1) ^{†††}



Other initiatives

- monitoring and research field work to collect data on sturgeon populations, habitats and spawning grounds – BG
- Restocking activities – BG
- Support feasibility study for a fishpass for Iron gates



Thank you!

danube-sturgeons.org

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