


Approaches to
tackle bycatch
and
lessons learned in
Lower Danube,
Black Sea



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- Least Concern
- Endangered
- Extinct in the wild
- Near Threatened
- Critically Endangered
- Extinct
- Vulnerable

Context of Black Sea Basin



Black Sea (Danube & Rioni)



● **Beluga sturgeon**
(*Huso huso*)



● **Stellate sturgeon**
(*Acipenser stellatus*)



● **Russian sturgeon complex**
(*A. gueldenstaedtii*) (*A. persicus colchicus*)



● **Sterlet sturgeon**
(*Acipenser ruthenus*)



● **Ship sturgeon**
(*Acipenser nudiventris*)*



● **European sturgeon**
(*Acipenser sturio*)

* **extinct in the Danube.**

A last refuge in Europe

In Europe only 2 rivers maintained reproducing sturgeon populations, the Danube and the Rioni River. Both drain into the Black Sea Basin.

Context - legal



- Fishing of wild sturgeons and trade in their products is prohibited in all Lower Danube and Black Sea countries
- Bulgaria as the only country has a ban with limited time until 2025(!)
- Obligation for reporting sturgeon bycatch exists in UA, was introduced in BG and RO only a few years ago
- Obligation to return any caught sturgeon to the water regardless of its state exists in UA, BG and RO

but

- Targeted poaching activities are ongoing and are being documented
- **Overlap between bycatch and trafficking if bycatch is maintained;**
- Mistrust of fishers to authorities (fear of being punished)
- Fishers do not report bycatch of sturgeon to authorities



Approach 1

Analysis of
data
on illegalities



Compilation of data from authorities

covering 3 countries with shared populations



© Bureau of Investigation, Ukraine



© Coast Guard Romania



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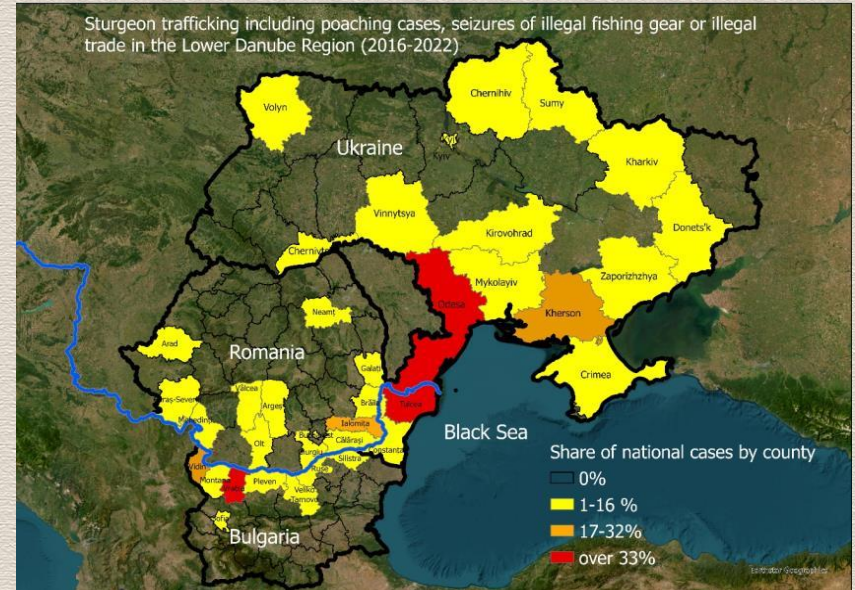
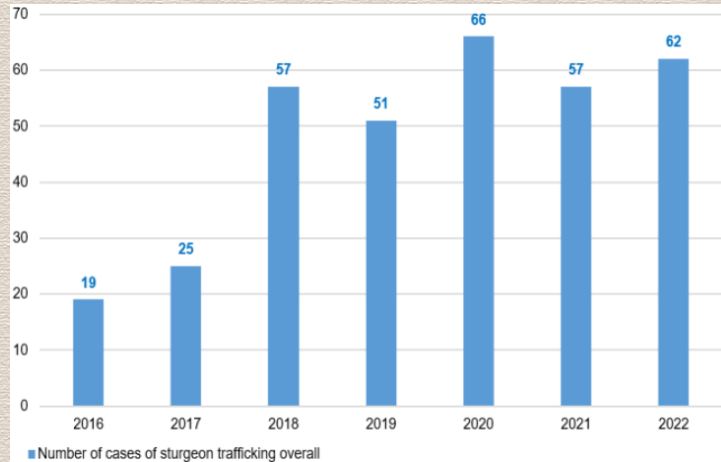


www.politiaromana.com

Annual publication of report

includes

- * analysis of cases
- * risk areas with percentage of accumulated cases



[Latest WWF report can be found here](#)

- does not allow distinction of bycatch/poaching
- Several risk areas are bordering the Black Sea



Approach
2

Support to
**law enforcement
authorities**

Support to detect illegalities

with surveillance cameras, sonars or drones, forensic analysis



© Bulgarian Border Police



© WWF

“Sturgeon Watchers” in Ukraine

joint patrols of fishing authorities with trained volunteers to raise awareness & motivation among authorities and locals



Training courses

28 training courses
> 600 officials
from 22 agencies



Training material

- brochures & videos on
- sturgeon identification
- safe handling & release
- caviar labelling
- EU TWIX
- legal framework



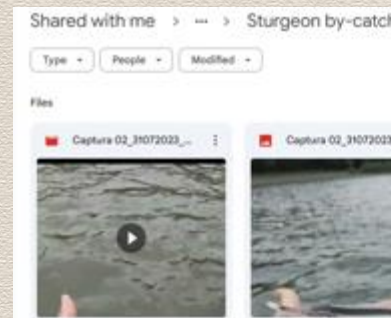
Joint development of bycatch reporting systems in Romania



- The structure of bycatch database developed together with National Institute for Marine Research and Development "Grigore Antipa" (NMIRD) and National Agency for Fishing and Aquaculture (NAFA).
- Common communication campaign on sturgeon bycatch reporting



Supported by IUCN Save Our Species, funded by La Prairie Group



**Pescari,
avem nevoie de ajutorul vostru
pentru salvarea sturionilor!**

Conform tabelului a Uniunii Internaționale pentru Conservarea Naturii (IUCN), sturionii sunt, în nivel global, cea mai amenințată specie de peamare. Risca cauzei principale a dispariției este reducerea în toate țările, inclusiv în România.

Deși, din o lungă timpuriu, au fost luate diverse măsuri de protecție a sturionilor, de la interdicția la programarea de reproducere în piscicultură de stat și de pescuit (sturionii) nu putem să nu ne gândim pentru salvarea acestor specii, fără implicarea pescarilor.

Ca pescari, puteți juca un rol crucial în protejerea sturionilor din Dunăre prin raportarea capturilor accidentale.

0211 442 442 (NAFA) sau 0211 442 442 (IUCN)

Asociația Națională de Pescari din România (ANP)

0211 442 442



Working with authorities – lessons learned



CHALLENGES:

- Authorities have high fluctuation of staff even up to director level
- low income, low training levels, little resources (fuel/boats/equipment)
 - motivation of staff low
 - corruption
 - hard to build capacity sustainably
 - difficult to maintain long term cooperation
- high and repeated investments needed from NGO

POSITIVE Learnings:

- Approaches developed WITH authorities work
 - bycatch reporting system
 - detection of illegal hook lines
 - joint patrols w volunteers
- Data analysis reports are appreciated

What is needed:

- More of the same
 - To achieve more self driven responsibility of the fishing authorities.
- repetition is an issue for funding!



Approach 3
**Working with
fishers**

Context – socio economical



- Communities feel neglected from central government (little development)
- Fishers still moan about sturgeon fishing ban – never received compensation
- Cultural pride some communities in Delta region are particularly "closed" to outsiders and proud about a long tradition in sturgeon fishing!

In Ukraine the ongoing war makes marine coast and Delta inaccessible for private ppl and fishers

Engage with fishermen



“Sturgeon Advocates” visit fishing communities regularly in order to build trust and awareness

Train fishers in sturgeon monitoring



Information material

- [Sturgeon ID guide](#)
- [Sturgeon ID training video](#)
- [How to handle and release sturgeon safely](#)



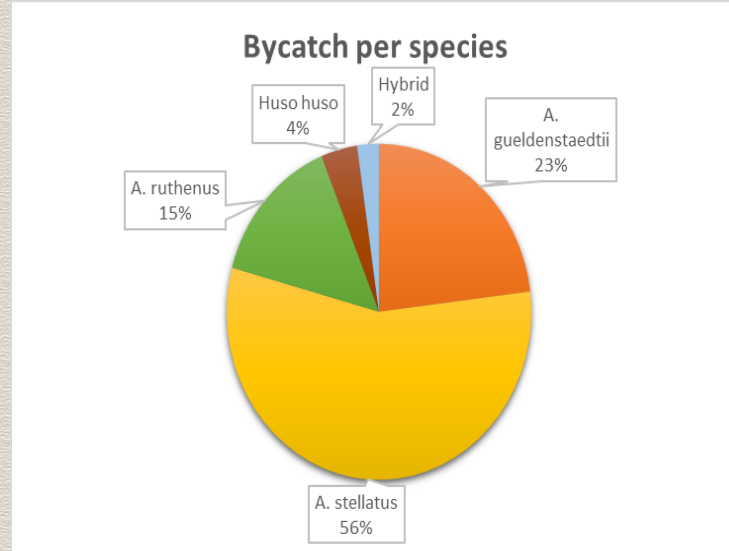
Encourage voluntary bycatch reporting in Bulgaria



Collecting data via smartphones from fishermen

6 phones distributed

- 265 photos/videos
- N=136 specimens (2018-2021)



Registered sturgeons as by-catch per sturgeon species in the Bulgarian sections of the Danube River and the Black Sea for the period 2018 – 2021 (according to data from fishermen) © WWF Bulgaria

Social Recognition Scheme

- Competition in the 3 fishing communities in Romania (Borcea, Fetesti and Galati)
- Most active boats from each community will receive prizes such as phone, nets, households goods (flour, sugar, oil, rice, wine, etc), t-shirts or caps



Lessons learned



Work with fishers need **long term interaction** in order to build trust

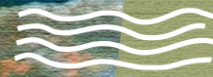
- No short results
- High staff investment

Mistrust between fishers and authorities is a key challenge

Changes in fishing regulations (such as bycatch reporting obligations) create confusion for authorities and fear of fishers on economic fishing

Voluntary reports provide limited overall picture

- Fishermen prefer sending a picture from cell phone and not filling in a report
- Mainly younger sturgeon (of low economic value) are reported
- Support from an expert needed to identify species, especially hybrids



Approach 4
Working with
Local communities



Giveaways & useful presents open doors

T-shirts, LED headlamps, life jackets, stickers, etc.

Activities & events in communities

raise interest in sturgeons, their (non-monetary) value and their protection

Youth work

educational materials (booklets for students & teachers, educational programs, video, games, etc.), sturgeon youth clubs, summer camps,...



©WWF Romania



©WWF Adria-Serbia

Development of alternative income options



Tourism

- Recreational services with boats & e-bikes (Romania)
- Gastronomic point with freshly caught fish (Romania)
- Boat rides along the Danube (Romania, Bulgaria)



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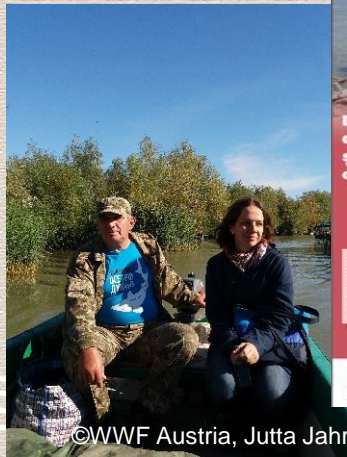
Sustainability

brand for sustainable tourism, local products, exhibition center (Serbia)



Business ventures

- Apple cider production (Ukraine)
- Frog farming (Ukraine)



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Doriți să vizitați atracțiile zonei Galați și să aflați povestea sturionilor chiar de la pescari?

Grupul de Producători "Letca" vă invită la o plimbare pe Dunăre cu vizite la obiective turistice din zona. Odată cînd vă vor fi chise pescarii, se voru pregătiți povești captivante, informații interesante și livadite livadite despre sturioni și pescuit.

Vă puteți alege traseul preferat:

Traseul 1:
Orășel - Priza Dunării - Chiciu - Pod - Piața lipovenescă - Brîdă (durată 30 minute) și retur (durată 2 ore). Preț 130 ron/persoană.

Traseul 2:
Orășel - Port dețel - Punctul de acostare a bărcilor pescărești - Bădău (durată 30 minute) - Priz - Inșua Colău - Orășel (durată 2 ore) Preț 130 ron/persoană.

Pentru detalii și rezervări:
Grupul de Producători "Letca", 0771 407 334

LA PRAIRIE
NATURA E ACASĂ



Lessons learned

Work with communities need **long term interaction** to identify first movers (open for change)

→ No short results

→ High staff investment

Little presents open doors

Developing **alternative income** activities with local communities is a long process and need to go through a lot of bureaucratic work and fishers fears

→ Builds trust and creates positive spirit

→ Impact on reduction of poaching or increase of bycatch releases remains to be demonstrated



Approach 5
Enhancing
legal
circumstances

Advocating for change of regulations



Ukrainian Danube delta

- Reduction of height of drift nets and thickness of threads
- Prohibition of non-selective fixed nets and nets with small mesh sizes
- Prohibition of any commercial fishing for central parts of the Ukrainian Danube delta

Increased penalties

- Ro illegal trade is a criminal act
- Higher fines UA and RO for poaching



© M. Yakovlev, Danube Biosphere Reserve

Amendment of Customs Act

-> CITES enforcement at Ukrainian borders



©WWF



Approach 6

Spreading
the
word

Awareness
raising

Public Campaign

“Sterlet belongs in the river, not on your plate”



Press work

press trips to fishing communities, documentaries, public screening, interviews, etc.



Conclusions – Summary of situation



Bycatch does occur in the river and marine waters

It overlaps with economic fisheries and it overlaps with poaching and illegal trade

Follow the framework of the [Pan European Action Plan for Sturgeon](#)

Assess bycatch – ongoing

Voluntary bycatch reports can be encouraged through different activities with fishers but do only provide a limited insight (i.e. mainly young specimens are reported)

→ They do not replace a systematic coherent assessment (GFCM)

- **Mitigation of bycatch identify and implement measures to reduce bycatch**
 - cross border harmonisation and simplification of fishing regulations needed (in particular re shad fisheries)

Conclusions – Summary of situation



- **Monitor compliance with existing obligations**

Trust issue between fishers and authorities need further attention
Changing regulations are challenging both

Authorities need resources ,
capacities, support

→ **Raising awareness and engaging fishers and communities is crucial for this.**





Sturgeon NEEDS US

We need to act now to save the
most threatened species group
on the planet



wwfcee.org/what-we-do/sturgeons

danube-sturgeons.org

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