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International Programme for the conservation and the restoration of the European Sturgeon (*Acipenser sturio*)

**INFORMATION AND AWARENESS-RAISING CAMPAIGN
on the risks related to accidental by-catch of European
sturgeon – Context and expansion to the European scale**

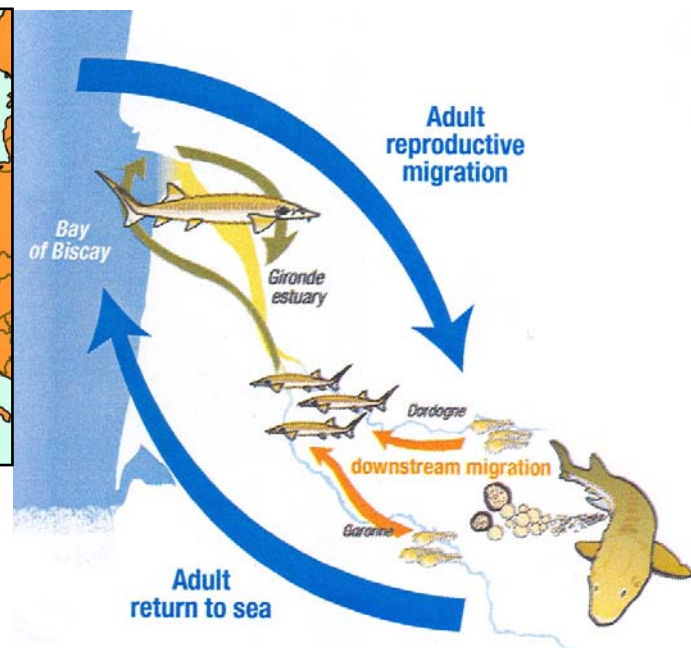
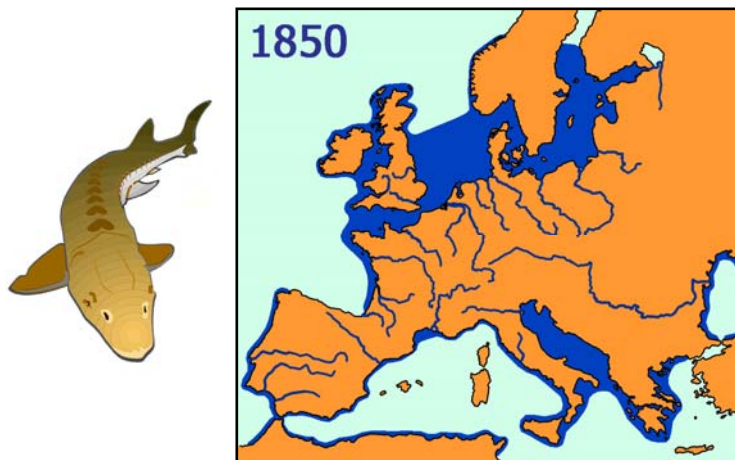
<http://www.comite-peches.fr/sturio-en.htm>





- *Acipenser sturio* – An endangered species

- Sturgeons: 27 species across the world (caviar and meat)
 - European sturgeon: the migratory wild species of the North-East Atlantic



- Actually: One single wild population

- Last reproduction sites on the Gironde basin
- Present at sea from the age of 8 (marine area)
- Maturity reached after 10 years (male) – 16 years (female)
- Population size estimated at a few hundred adults at sea
- Lifespan presumed at least over 60 years, impressive length and weigh



- European sturgeon: a strictly protected species

• Multiple Dangers:

- Destruction of its basic habitats (spawning grounds and nurseries);
- Water pollution;
- Increasing obstacles to migration;
- Commercial fishing for the caviar.



• Maximum Protection:

- + International conventions on the protection of the environment and species
CITES / OSPAR / Bern Convention / Bonn Convention – UICN Red list
- + Protected in Europe since 1998 - Habitats Directive:
Priority species of Community interest (Annex II)
- + Protected in France (1982) as under national legislation in most countries of its historic range : **UK (1981), Belgium (1973-1992), Germany (1976), Spain (1989), The Netherlands, etc.**



... ➤ Contribution to protect all the migratory fish species





- Restoration & Conservation: actions last 30 years

➔ **Initiatives conducted in France since the 1970s** - Involvement of research institutes, professional fishermen, local authorities:

- Precision of the **sturgeon ecology**: (lifecycle, diet...) and monitoring of the wild population
- Characterisation and protection of the essential **natural habitats** for the species on the Gironde basin
- Constitution of a **captive stock** of future breeders: 79 and 15 adults or almost mature specimens (from 13 to 35 years old) in the Cemagref and IGB breeding stations in 2007



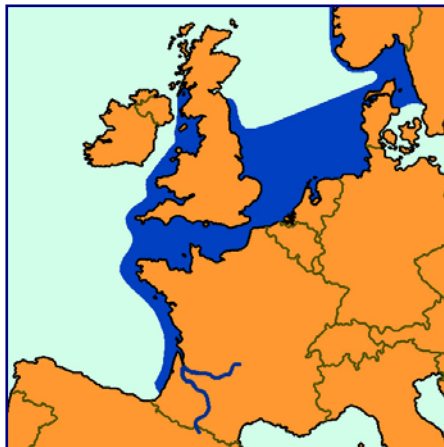
➔ **Marine journey poorly documented** - Implementation of tagging experiments and investigations in Europe:

- Sturgeon incidental **catches at sea are important**
- **Lack of knowledge** about the species and its status in fisheries sector





- Accidental catches at sea



- Sturgeon live in coastal and shallow waters (depth $\leq 100\text{m}$)
- Sturgeon are trapped by bottom trawl, trammel and gill nets



- Mortalities resulting from marine incidental catches are considered as one of the **main threats** to the endangered species
- **Strong resistance** of sturgeon to the effects of capture



The survival of each specimen is precious – Fishermen behaviour could influence the future of this species





- Communication campaign in France in 2006



- **Main objectives:** to increase the probabilities for the breeders to return to their spawning grounds and to improve the ecological knowledge of the species in the marine waters
- **Targets:** French professional fishing fleet (bottom trawlers and netters of the Bay of Biscay and the Channel coasts) and a French partner's network (organisations and actors of the local professional environment of the fishermen)
- **Goals:** to activate and strengthen the information network of the French marine sector, and circulate messages within it about the species' status and the captures





- Main results and continuation of the actions

• Main results of the campaign:

- **Activation of the information network:**
 - 300 representatives of marine organisations
 - More than 60 fishing harbours
- **2000 trawlers and netters and 6 000 fishermen**
- **5 European sturgeons were caught by French fishermen in 2007 – All of them survived to the catch (released alive or transferred to a breeding station)**



••• ➤ **Existence of a wild population and the mobilisation of the sector**

• **Continuation of the communication actions on the French coasts in 2007-2008:**

Promotion of the campaign outputs / animation of the network / in-depth actions around the Gironde estuary, development of new communication tools, etc.





- There is renewed hope for the species

- Since 2006: Mobilisation in France and Belgium of the professional fishermen and activation of an information network in favour of European sturgeon's protection
- July 2007: First artificial reproduction using seed fish reared in captivity
Several thousand alevins were released in September on the Gironde watershed
 - ➔ More artificial reproductions are expected in the upcoming years
- November 2007: Adoption of the International Action Plan for the restoration of European sturgeon under Bern Convention
 - ➔ A French national action plan will be presented before the end of 2008





- Expansion of the campaign to the scale of the European sturgeon distribution area

Year after year, several sturgeons are lost as fishermen are not aware of the species' legal status and the instructions to be followed if caught

Caught dead, Wales, 2004



Released alive, Belgium, 2007



Landed, The Netherlands, 2007

- ➔ Due to its migration and reintroduction prospects, **the protection of European sturgeon requires the involvement of Europe-wide fisheries**
- ➔ The concerned countries have a fishing fleet working on the distribution area: UK, Ireland, Belgium, The Netherlands, Germany, Denmark, Spain, etc.





- CNPME Contribution to the European campaign

• Design new communication tools:

- **Booklet and poster** adapted to the international context and translated into English, German, Dutch, Danish and Spanish
- **Information** about the biology, threats, legal status, conservation actions and the **instructions to be followed in the event of an accidental catch**



• Settle an European network to transmit information but also to collect data on sturgeon captures:



- Identify and mobilize organisations to carry on the communication campaign at the local or national level
- Update and specify the situation of the European sturgeon





- Thank you for your attention and collaboration

- As a protected species both nationally and internationally, it is **strictly prohibited to transport or sell a European sturgeon**
- The species is an **ideally indicator for environmental quality** and connectivity and an excellent model species for good ecological status in rivers, estuaries and marine waters. **The different actions implemented for the European sturgeon restoration contribute to protect all the migratory fish species**
- Fisheries' commitment to this conservation issue is definitely a positive way of raising the profession's profile, as working for a responsible management of marine resources



SAVE OUR STURGEON

Take the right actions to save the last specimens

<http://www.comite-peches.fr/sturio-en.htm>

Know/Protect/Inform/Raise awareness • Record/Release/Declare
A recognised challenge and essential commitment on a European scale to save our European sturgeon