



A unique migration run

The Danube River Basin was formerly home to six sturgeon species, namely beluga, Russian, stellate, ship, European sturgeon and sterlet. All are highly endangered or, in the case of ship and European sturgeon, already extinct in the Danube. In the past these ancient fish migrated nearly 2000 km from the Danube Delta to Vienna to spawn, a journey undertaken for millions of years.

However, over the past century, the situation for these sturgeons has dramatically deteriorated. Decades of overfishing, driven by the high value of caviar, severely depleted their numbers and the last documented catches of beluga sturgeon in the Upper Danube were over 100 years ago. Habitat destruction and blocked migration routes, particularly from the construction of hydropower plants, further intensified their decline. The building of the Iron Gate dams in 1972 and 1984 was especially devastating, effectively cutting off access to the Upper and Middle Danube for anadromous sturgeon species. These structures made it impossible to undertake long migration runs and to reach their historic spawning grounds, confining the remaining anadromous sturgeon species to the Lower Danube. Nowadays, the sterlet is the only existing sturgeon species in the Upper and Middle Danube.

In April 2024, a unique “migration run” for adult beluga, stellate and Russian sturgeons was completed. However, this journey was not accomplished by water, but by land. The **LIFE-Boat4Sturgeon** team transported the sturgeons from the Romanian caviar farm “Danube Caviar” near the Danube Delta to the project’s facilities in Vienna and Hungary in a specially designed trailer during a 22-hour journey. This “migration” is the first in many years for these anadromous sturgeon species.

Further information and contact

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Danube Day 2024

With the largest mobile aquarium in Europe placed in the heart of Vienna from June 21st to 23rd, the project **LIFE-Boat4Sturgeon** drew attention to the precarious situation of the sturgeons and the importance of preserving and protecting the unique habitat of the Danube. This impressive installation, measuring twelve meters in length and containing 60,000 liters of water, featured sturgeons and other Danube fish and brought the project and the Danube ecosystem closer to the public.

This event, part of the Danube Day 2024, was made possible through collaboration with the Natural History Museum and the Burghauptmannschaft. Representatives of the largest Austrian project partners were awarded sturgeon sponsorships as a symbol of their long-term commitment.

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