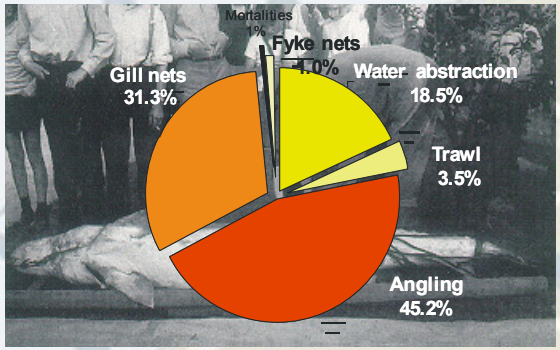
The risks

Sturgeon have the potential to become extraordinarily old; however, it takes them 10-15 years to reproduce for the first time. During these years they are subjected to a variety of hazards such as pollution, sewage discharges, water abstraction and marine transportation, as well as highly intensive fisheries. Trawls, fyke nets, gillnets and baited hooklines are major threats to sturgeons of all ages.



Contribution of different activities to catches of exotic sturgeon species in German and neighbouring waters from 1994 to 2003 (%of total catch N=323)

What can I do?

In order to allow the restoration project to be successful in the long run, the active support of fishermen is required. While we rely on well informed anglers to be responsible and release an accidentally caught sturgeon, the risk of lethal by-catch is much higher in gillnet and trawl fisheries.

It makes a difference if you make the right decision since this ensures the survival of the individual and as a consequence it impacts the success of the restoration measure.

Since there is a higher chance of catching a sturgeon in commercial fisheries than in recreational angling, you can contribute to the knowledge on the species by sending us a catch report including all vital data on the fish and how it was caught. This will help us to improve understanding of migrations and behaviour of sturgeon in the Baltic Sea as well as increasing the chances of its re-establishment.

The last Baltic sturgeon, caught 1996 off Saarema Island, Estonia, total length 293cm (© T. Paaver)

The pilot projects for the re-establishment of the sturgeon in the Baltic Sea are being carried out in the Odra and Vistula rivers. During the first years of the experiment, it has been observed that the fish migrate over hundreds of kilometres in just a few months; therefore, it is quite conceivable that you will encounter a sturgeon sooner or later.

If this happens, please strive to the fullest of your abilities to release the fish alive. Make use of the attached reporting sheet and provide us with information urgently required to improve the knowledge of these remarkable but vulnerable fish. In return a reward will be sent to you.

Help us to help the sturgeon to return.

Gesellschaft zur Rettung des Störs e.V.
Fischerweg 408, 18069 Rostock
Tel: 0381-8113429
Fax: 0381-8113430
E-mail: Baltic@sturgeon.de

The sturgeon returns

...but it needs your help!

Past and present

The sturgeon is a living fossil, dating back over 200 million years.

It has outlived the dinosaurs. Until the end of the 19th century it was an important part of the fish communities of all major rivers and coastal waters in the southern Baltic. It had a remarkable impact on the people wherever it once was abundant.

Increasing pollution and hydro constructions have deteriorated its habitats. Similar negative impacts have been noted in a variety of migratory fish as well. Drastic overharvest of the remaining spawners prior to reproduction set the stage for its extinction in the middle of the 20th century.

Sturgeon catch at the onset of the 20th century (© Museum of Natural History, Magdeburg, Germany)

Today, the reestablishment of the sturgeon would not only help to halt the loss of biodiversity, but could also allow for the return of other migratory and riverine fish species with similar habitat requirements as the sturgeon.

The association

The Gesellschaft zur Rettung des Störs e.V. (Society to Save the Sturgeon) was founded in 1994 by scientists, practitioners and administrators to coordinate and effect in close cooperation with the stakeholders in neighbouring countries the return of the living fossil into the waters in central Europe

The target

Since the onset of the 1990s the water quality of many German rivers has improved significantly. This has created the opportunity to re-establish our largest freshwater fish species.

The long-term aim to build up self-sustaining sturgeon populations through natural reproduction and recruitment is necessary to ensure the long-term survival of the species in its environment.

HELCOM has supported the re-establishment since 1997 and has included the sturgeon as a target in its Biodiversity Programme.

Baltic-sturgeon *Acipenser oxyrinchus*
©G. V. Rijkevorsel

Reporting Form

IMPORTANT: Please leave the tag on the fish!

Total length (from snout to tip of tail in cm) _____

Wet weight: _____

Condition, injuries:_____

Colour and type of tag:_____

Tag number: _____

Date and time of catch:_____

Waterbody, position:_____

Depth, distance to shore:_____

Gear, bait: _____

Name: _____

Contact: _____

Phone/Fax/e-mail/Address:_____

_____

_____

Please return the filled in form immediately to the address on the opposite page.

Thank you sturgeonly!