Legal and illegal caviar trade in Bulgaria and Romania

LIFE Sturgeon Workshop, Sofia
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Overfishing and unsustainable caviar trade are the main threats to Danube sturgeons

Despite the catch and trade ban in Romania and Bulgaria, illegal fishing and trade seem to continue.

There are many stories, but clear facts are missing.
Legal caviar trade in Bulgaria and Romania

Until some years ago, Romania and Bulgaria were among the top-10 caviar exporting countries worldwide.

1998-2008, Bulgaria exported 20.4 tons of caviar, 76% from Beluga.
Legal caviar trade in Bulgaria and Romania

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1998-2008, Bulgaria exported 20.4 tons of caviar, 76% from Beluga.

Wild caviar decreased, farmed caviar increased.

Katalin Kecse-Nagy (2011): Trade in Sturgeon Caviar in Bulgaria and Romania
Illegal caviar trade in Bulgaria and Romania

Reported seizure data 2000-2009 showed 5 cases in:
Austria,
Italy,
France,
Netherlands,
with Bulgaria as departure/transit country,

but no seizures were reported by Bulgaria.
Illegal caviar trade
in Bulgaria and Romania

An **undercover market survey** in Bulgaria and Romania was conducted to get information about illegal activities.

Between April 2011 and February 2012, surveyors visited shops, restaurants, markets, street vendors, fish farms etc. in major cities, Black Sea resorts, fishing villages.
Undercover market survey in Bulgaria and Romania

In app. 100 visits to 79 sites, 30 samples were obtained:

- 14 in Romania
- 14 in Bulgaria
- 2 Bulgarian farm caviar in Austria

All were DNA tested to determine the species of origin.
Undercover market survey in Bulgaria and Romania

15 samples had the mandatory CITES labels.

15 samples were obtained without labels (incl. 7 from restaurants).
Undercover market survey in Bulgaria and Romania

Of the 15 samples without CITES labels

- 6 were fake
- 5 were sold as from wild sturgeons (at least 4 Beluga)
Undercover market survey
in Bulgaria and Romania

Of the 15 samples with CITES labels
- 3 were from species/hybrids other than on the label
- 2 were from mixed species (not legitimate)
Illegal caviar trade is happening in Bulgaria and Romania

Illegal caviar was sold in Romania and offered for sale in Bulgaria.

Illegal caviar is said to be sold also across borders: between Romania and Bulgaria through Ruse; from Ukraine to Bulgaria by ship; from the Caspian Sea through Ukraine or Moldova.

Traders of illegal caviar are careful and alert and want to sell only to people they know (-> covered trade chain).
Illegal fishing of sturgeons is happening in Bulgaria and Romania

Fishermen in Bulgaria told that they are still fishing sturgeons, using illegal equipment ("carmazi"; electric devices).

„Carmazi“ are still confiscated.

Wild caught sterlets are offered for sale in both countries.
To protect sturgeons from extinction
strong law enforcement is necessary

Controls at
- land border crossings,
- airports,
- seaports,
- (cruise) ships and ferries,
- points of sale (restaurants, shops, markets…),
- in fishing villages, etc.

Aquaculture operations

Internet
To protect sturgeons from extinction
strong law enforcement is necessary

Always check for CITES labels
-> any caviar container without CITES label is illegal

Labelling is no guarantee
-> random use of modern technology (DNA analysis; isotope analysis) to reveal fraud
To protect sturgeons from extinction, strong law enforcement is necessary.

Increased interagency and transborder cooperation
Exchange of information, experiences, seizure data, etc.
More attention and resources for enforcement
Thank you very much for your attention!