



FACTSHEET

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PROGRAMME



## Conservation

# The caviar trade



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Caviar is considered a delicacy and this makes it one of the most expensive wildlife products. According to trade statistics, the European Union (EU), the USA and Switzerland are the largest importers of caviar globally with 81% of all caviar imports in legal international trade between 1998 and 2006. Among the EU Member States, France and Germany are the largest importers. Romania and Bulgaria were significant exporters of caviar from wild sturgeons and still hold the only major – and now strictly protected – natural populations in the EU.

The demand for caviar has led to overexploitation and consequently to the dramatic decline of sturgeons worldwide. In order to ensure the survival of the species and to achieve

sustainability, in 1998 all sturgeon species were listed under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). Today, all caviar in international trade (exports, imports and re-exports) must be accompanied by CITES documents and all containers in domestic and international trade must bear special CITES labels.

The taste for caviar has also led to the proliferation of illegal caviar trade. Continuing seizures of illegal caviar in Europe indicate that there is a thriving black market. They also demonstrate that caviar smugglers are well-organized and use sophisticated methods. The illegal caviar trade is considered to have strong links with organized crime.



**ALL CAVIAR**

**MUST HAVE  
CITES LABELS**

## Farmed caviar

Caviar does not only come from wild sturgeons. Sturgeon farming is a fast growing aquaculture sector with reported trade of caviar having significantly increased, often doubling from year to year. Sturgeon farming is growing fast in Bulgaria and Romania. When operating in accordance with nature conservation principles, this industry can be positive both for local livelihoods and for wild sturgeons. However, there are concerns that aquaculture operations offer an opportunity to launder illegally obtained caviar.

## Recognizing legal from illegal caviar

All countries which have signed CITES must implement a standardized labelling system for all caviar containers in domestic and international trade. This system allows law enforcers to track the origin of caviar and – also consumers – to identify whether it is legal or not. Since May 2006, the labelling system has been obligatory in the EU.

## Caviar labelling requirements

All primary containers must have a non-reusable label, which means that the label cannot be removed without being damaged. The label must either seal the container or must be fixed in a way to permit visual evidence if the container has been opened. The labelling requirements apply to all caviar - from wild caught or farmed sturgeons. Caviar processing and (re-)packaging plants, including caviar producing aquaculture operations, as well as exporters need to be licensed by the management authority of CITES in member countries in order to be allowed to process, (re-)package or export caviar.

## Caviar labels



The label for caviar containers must include the following information:

|                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| STANDARD SPECIES CODE                                                             | Three-letter code for the identification of sturgeon species, hybrids and mixed species. BAE for example stands for <i>Acipenser baerii</i> .                                                                                             |
| SOURCE CODE OF THE CAVIAR OR SPECIMEN                                             | W = sturgeon harvested from the wild.<br>C = captive-bred sturgeon.                                                                                                                                                                       |
| CODE FOR THE COUNTRY OF ORIGIN                                                    | ISO two-letter code.                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| YEAR OF HARVEST OR REPACKAGING                                                    | The year the sturgeon was caught or the specimens repackaged.                                                                                                                                                                             |
| OFFICIAL REGISTRATION CODE OF THE PROCESSING OR REPACKAGING PLANT                 | The code follows the national registration system for processing plants, which countries must establish; or, for repackaging, incorporates the ISO two-letter code of the country of repackaging if different from the country of origin. |
| LOT IDENTIFICATION NUMBER, OR CITES EXPORT PERMIT OR RE-EXPORT CERTIFICATE NUMBER | The code is issued according to the caviar tracking system used by the processing or repackaging plant.                                                                                                                                   |



## LABELS

ALLOW CONSUMERS  
TO TELL LEGAL FROM  
ILLEGAL CAVIAR

FIGHTING ILLEGAL  
TRADE OR FRAUD  
IS IN THE INTEREST  
OF ENFORCEMENT  
AGENCIES, THE  
CAVIAR INDUSTRY,  
CONSUMERS AND  
CONSERVATIONISTS.



### Why we are here.

To stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.

[www.danube-sturgeons.org](http://www.danube-sturgeons.org)

The project "Joint actions to raise awareness on overexploitation of Danube sturgeons in Romania and Bulgaria" aims to tackle overfishing, the main direct threat to the survival of Danube sturgeons.

### For more information:

[www.danube-sturgeons.org](http://www.danube-sturgeons.org)