



YANGTZE STURGEONS



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Acipenser dabryanus

WHY SHOULD WE SAVE STURGEON?

Sturgeon have existed almost unchanged for 200 million years. **Among the largest and most iconic freshwater fish**, sturgeon can live for 100 years, growing up to 7m long and weighing up to 1.5 tonnes. Or they could. Large sturgeon are now very few and far between. Having survived the extinction of the dinosaurs, sturgeon today are **the most endangered group of species globally**. Once widespread across the Northern hemisphere, the damming of rivers that blocked their migration routes coupled with growing demand for caviar wiped out many sturgeon populations, eradicating them from most rivers. But together, we can save sturgeon from extinction and invest in a nature-positive future.

THE YANGTZE

The Yangtze has been the cradle of Chinese civilization for millennia. Today, the mighty river and its vast basin are struggling with numerous environmental problems arising from population pressure and rapid economic development. **The Yangtze River Basin has some of the highest levels of biodiversity in the world**—from towering mountains and dense forests to fertile wetlands and bustling waterways created by seasonal flooding. However, with many Yangtze's fish species endangered or extinct, the river's health is of serious concern. Prior to damming activities along the Yangtze, the **Chinese sturgeon had the longest migration of any sturgeon species in the world**, once migrating over 3,200km up the Yangtze.

WHY ARE THE YANGTZE STURGEON THREATENED?

Despite fishing bans, the remaining species of sturgeon face a very uncertain future. The real challenge in the Yangtze for the recovery of sturgeon is the **loss of access to their spawning habitats**. Several hydropower dams have been constructed on the main Yangtze River, including the Gezhouba in 1981, or the gigantic Three Gorges in 2003 which interrupted the migration route of sturgeon from the sea. The operation of the dams also lead to changes in sediment and water flow as well as temperature changes, which have a big influence on sturgeon behavior.

WHAT MUST BE DONE?

Without urgent, concerted efforts to restore the habitat of these ancient fish, sturgeon populations will not be able to recover in the Yangtze River Basin. These efforts will need to be implemented across the entirety of the presently flowing Yangtze River, across multiple ecosystems from the eastern coast of China and throughout the river system. With the status of both species in peril, **each individual sturgeon matters**.

NOT ON OUR WATCH!

- **Last Call** – Rescue Action Plans for the Chinese and Yangtze Sturgeon together with the Yangtze River Protection Law have been issued which strongly stress the urgent need and actions for swift & concerted conservation actions for the Yangtze River Basin.
- **A Warning to Freshwater Species** – Sturgeon are iconic fish of ancient origin and have become symbols of healthy and free flowing river systems connected to the sea. If we cannot save a flagship species, chances are that other freshwater species will go extinct unnoticed!
- **Reintroduction is a last resort** – Reintroducing a species that has gone extinct in the wild is sometimes possible if captive stocks are available but saving remaining populations is far more cost effective.
- **High Commercial and Cultural Value** – Sturgeon provide an economic and cultural value to many rivers in the Northern hemisphere. If we bring back sturgeon populations and if fishers catch them sustainably, we can boost local economies and create long term incomes for families.

Chinese sturgeon, *Acipenser sinensis*



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YANGTZE STURGEONS

THE FIGHT FOR THE GIANTS OF THE YANGTZE

YANGTZE RIVER & BASIN STURGEON POPULATIONS



WHAT IS WWF DOING?

WWF is committed to halting the extinction of sturgeon species and ensuring that "By 2030, populations of native species of sturgeons are stable or recovering in the Yangtze River Basin". Globally we work along 4 Strategies to:

Halt Overexploitation through By-Catch, Illegal Fishing and Trade - Ensure the moratorium(10 year) on fishing activity and local regulations are adhered to and if data supports, have it extended and ensure the capacity of public fishing inspectors and of protected areas authorities is increased to tackle illegal fishing.

Protect and Restore Resilient Habitats & Migration Corridors - It is critical to regulate water releases and flow conditions to allow spawning conditions. WWF will work with colleagues in China to better understand the spatio-temporal distribution of sturgeon in the Yangtze and in turn better understand the few suitable habitats left in the Yangtze and is promoting and supporting restoration work of key habitats.

Conservation Breeding and Release Programs - Government-led ex-situ programs for both species of sturgeon exist, WWF encourages scientists to research on the whole-life-history to enhance the efficiency and will work with authorities to better manage the wild population restoration initiative and gain more support for the proper release program.

Raise Public Awareness and Political Will to Support Implementation - WWF in cooperation with stakeholders will increase the awareness to decision makers about the threats to sturgeon, to achieve a much needed holistic approach for sturgeon conservation in the Yangtze.

SPECIES INFORMATION

Yangtze / Dabry's sturgeon (*Acipenser dabryanus*)

- Known in Chinese as the "king of freshwater fish"
- Captive stock exists and releases are ongoing but there is no reproduction in the wild
- Status: Extinct in the Wild

Chinese sturgeon (*Acipenser sinensis*)

- Can reach more than 3 m
- Anadromous – spends large part of its life in marine coastal water but reproduces in the river
- Used to migrate upward to 3.200km but now is restricted to the Lower Yangtze River below Gezhouba Dam & coastal waters
- Last natural spawning recorded in 2016, releases ongoing
- Status: Critically Endangered

Chinese Paddlefish (*Psephurus gladius*)

- Was endemic to the Yangtze River
- Last seen in the Yangtze River in 2003
- No captive populations exist
- Status: Extinct – this species is lost

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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