

### Editorial

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Dear Readers,

This issue of Danube News highlights the topic sturgeon and possible ways of saving these flagship species of the Danube Basin, so typical in the past, but increasingly threatened by growing habitat constraints, overexploitation, and disruption of migration. Scientific and administrative efforts converge with the aim of enhancing sturgeon conservation, while technical adaptations of river flow, migration obstacles, loss of spawning habitat, and illegal fishing still impact the survival base of sturgeon in the Danube River, and in all the countries comprising the range of these fish. The contributions to this issue cover political aspects of sturgeon conservation (Cristina Sandu), programs of Sterlet restoration (Thomas Friedrich *et al.*), challenges in sturgeon



Thomas Hein,  
President of IAD



Georg Janauer, Editor of DN  
Photograph: ÖWAV

ex-situ conservation (Ralf Reinartz *et al.*), sturgeon monitoring with telemetry and genetics (Radu Suciuc *et al.*), and the paramount issue of obstacles to sturgeon migration during the spawning period due to dams and navigation projects (Jürg Bloesch).

Cristina Sandu, and Jürg Bloesch as Special Editor of DN 33, gain our special thanks for proposing this important topic and gathering these excellent and informative contributions.

## Political support for sturgeon conservation in the Danube Region

*Cristina Sandu: Institute of Biology Bucharest, Romanian Academy, e-mail: cristina.sandu@dstf.eu*

The public attention gained lately by Danube sturgeons is the output of the close cooperation of several governmental and non-governmental organizations active in the Danube River Basin. The adoption of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) in 2011 created the frame to foster sturgeon conservation and bring this topic high on the political agenda of the Danube countries.

This issue of Danube News highlights briefly the contribution of key governmental stakeholders as well as some of the main activities devoted to sturgeons in the recent years: a restoration program for Sterlet in the Upper and Middle Danube, measures for ex-situ conservation (outside of natural habitats), monitoring of genetic diversity and migration patterns in the Lower Danube, engagement to tackle the problem of major obstacles disrupting sturgeon spawning migration, and investigation of the illegal trade with caviar.

### Background

An iconic species of the Danube, inhabiting the river since ancient times, the sturgeons underwent a dramatic decline in the 20th century due to habitat loss, migration disruption, pollution, hydromorphological alterations and overexploitation. An alarm signal was raised by scientists after 2000, when the IAD and WWF brought together international sturgeon experts to discuss this critical situation. As a follow up, the Sturgeon Action Plan (SAP) was elaborated and adopted under the Bern Convention (Bloesch *et al.* 2005). Few supporting activities were launched in the following years by the Danube countries, such as a ban of commercial sturgeon fishery in Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia and the Ukraine, restocking activities and a dialogue to restore their spawning migration at the Iron Gate dams. However, without concerted coordination at international level, taking into account sturgeon needs during their whole life-cycle, the declining trends continued.

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## Hydrological catchment of the River Danube

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