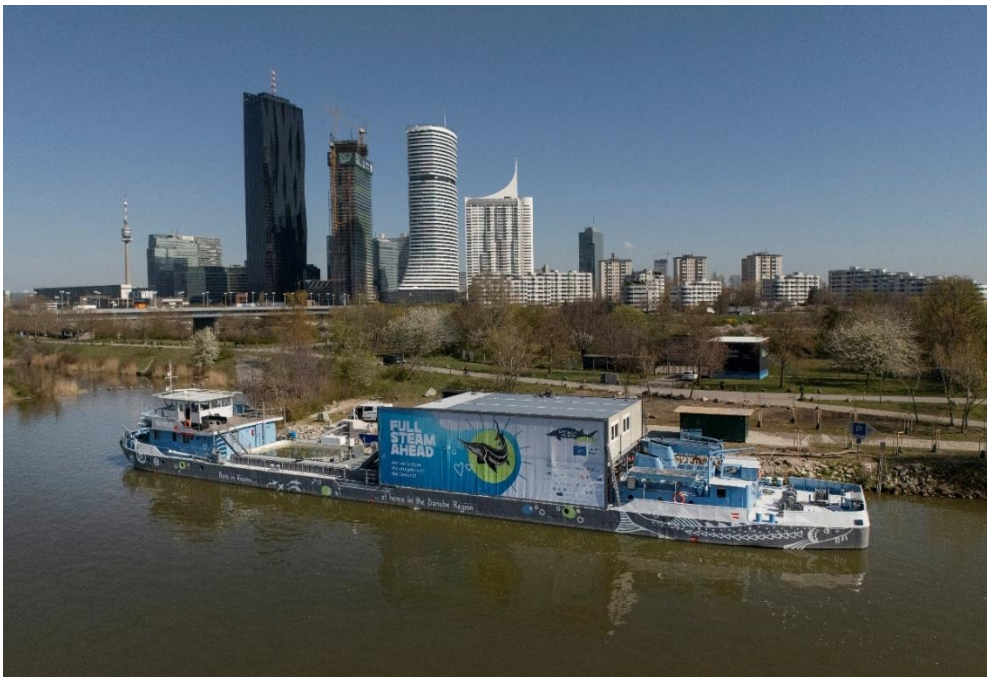
BOKU
Institute of Hydrobiology and Aquatic Ecosystem Management

LIFE-Boat4Sturgeon

Working Report 2025



PARTNERS

CO-FINANCIERS

With the contribution of the LIFE-Programme of the European Union

Legal Notice

LIFE-Boat4Sturgeon is under the project lead of the BOKU University. The majority fo the funding (67%) is provided by the EU through the LIFE programme. Project partners are the Austrian Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Climate and Environmental Protection, Regions and Water Mangagement, viadonau, the City of Vienna – Water Management, WWF Romania, WWF Ukraine, WWF Bulgaria, Revivo, MATE AKI HAKI, the Federal Agency for Water Management, the IUCN, the Bezirk Niederbayern, and the Haus des Meeres. Co-Financiers of the project are the Hungarian Ministry "Miniszterelnökség", the Slovenian Ministry for Natural Resources "Ministrstvo za nravne vire in prostor", Landesfischereiverband Bayern e.V., Niederösterreichische Landesfischereiverband, Oberösterreichische Landesfischereiverband Österreichische Fischereigesellschaft 1880, Verband der Österreichischen Arbeiter-Fischerei-Vereine, Wiener Fischereiausschuss, Fischereirevierverband I, Fischereirevierverband II, Fischereirevier Donau C, Nationalpark Donau-Auen, Marktgemeinde Drösing and several smaller investors.

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Contents

Project description

The project LIFE-Boat4Sturgeon builds upon the methods and results of the LIFE-Sterlet project. From 2022 to 2030, the project aims to establish a genetically diverse captive broodstock of mature animals for all four remaining Danube sturgeon species: Russian sturgeon (*Acipenser gueldenstaedtii*), sterlet (*Acipenser ruthenus*), stellate sturgeon (*Acipenser stellatus*) and beluga sturgeon (*Huso huso*) in at least two locations (AT and HU).
Those stocks will be maintained over the long-term to preserve the gene pool and to support all four species with genetically diverse, autochthonous and fit juveniles. In Austria, a floating rearing station was built in the Danube in the centre of Vienna, in addition to the existing LIFE-Sterlet hatchery container. A similar hatchery container will be built in Apače in Slovenia, next to the Mura River and a juvenile rearing system was constructed in Hungary at the Körös River. The held broodstock of all species will be continuously expanded through different genotypes, and the reproduction through a studbook enables the greatest possible genetic diversity of the offspring. The goal is to release a total 1.6 million juveniles within the project time.
Existing monitoring efforts are to be continued and intensified to document the development of the populations. Furthermore, an investigation along the entire Danube and selected tributaries for possible residual populations will be carried out. For the entire Danube Region and other European catchments, a long-term database and manual for *ex-situ* actions and monitoring in sturgeon conservation will be provided. Further objectives are the coordination with fishing authorities and communities along the Lower Danube and Black Sea to reduce IUU (illegal, undocumented, unreported) fishing and to raise public awareness.

WP 1 – Project management

At the end of October 2025, the Midterm Report was submitted to the EU. This report covered all project activities within the respective work packages, as well as the financial reporting from the start of the project in autumn 2022 up to the end of August 2025.
In this context, the project monitor, Dr. Bergmann, visited the project leader (BOKU-IHG) at the beginning of October to document the project's progress and to clarify any uncertainties related to the reporting.
On May 8, 2025, a project meeting with all partners took place at the Inselinfo on the Danube Island.

WP 2 – Ex situ AT

T.2.1 Construction of the LIFE-Boat

Ship Conversion

The hatchery infrastructure in Austria was built on the former sediment transporter MS Negrelli. Work at the shipyard in Linz on the ship conversion was completed in December 2024. It was transferred to Vienna at the end of January 2025. Final work, as well as connection to the power grid, water supply from land and the installation of mesh banners on the port and starboard sides of the container walls, were completed in early April. The installation of the photovoltaic system and the alarm system took place in the summer of 2025. Their final inspection and approval were carried out in July and August 2025, respectively.

Figure 1: The LIFE-Boat seen from the Danube (Vienna, Austria). ©viadonau/Zinner

Figure 2: Hatchery container on the LIFE-Boat for rearing juveniles. © Julia Altpfart

*Figur*e 3: Young of the year sterlets in the rearing facility on the LIFE-Boat. © Julia Altpfart

Figure 4: Broodstock basin on the LIFE-Boat. © Julia Altpfart

Mooring point

The mooring point was completed at the end of 2024. The forecourt was designed as an unsealed area and was therefore paved and planted with new trees, wildflowers, shrubs and berry bushes. The reconstructed embankment was planted with willows, and a bicycle stand in form of the project logo was installed. The forecourt was finished by the end of March 2025.

Figure 5: Bicycle stand in form of the project logo at the forecourt. ©RAFFEINER/APA-Fotoservice

T.2.2 Collection of broodstock

All acquired broodstock individuals were genetically tested to ensure they originate from the Danube. The broodstock is distributed over several facilities in Austria and the facility of MATE AKI HAKI in Hungary. The following numbers of mature and subadult animals per species are held in AT and HU (Table 1). All subadult individuals will reach maturity within the project's duration.

Table 1: Adult and subadult broodstock in the Austrian and Hungarian facilities. In brackets animals that were already present at the facilities of partners that still need to be genetically investigated of their origin.

Species	Austria	Hungary
A. ruthenus	551	190
A. stellatus	24 (3)	20 (3)
A. gueldenstaedtii	59 (4)	13 (37)
H. huso	36	7

Collection of broodstock was partially funded by the IUCN Sturgex Grant.

Investigations in haplotype (DNA-variations) and relatedness within broodstock are nearly finished by the University of Padova and reveal high genetic variability due to many of the fish being F1 of wild broodstock.

Figure 6: Stellate sturgeon broodstock kept in the broodstock basin on the LIFE-Boat. © Paul Vecsei

While the broodstock goals set within the project have been nearly achieved, genetic samples of additional fish are still being analyzed to increase the genetic variability of the broodstock and to search for rare haplotypes not yet present in the stock.

For the sterlet, the use of wild broodstock from the population east of Vienna and, since the inclusion of Bavaria in 2025, from the Jochenstein population is still deemed to provide the best gamete quality. Hence, broodstock is captured every late winter to spring and then temporarily held at the LIFE-Boat. To maintain the genetic lineages, F1 of each family are retained at the facility as a back-up, if wild fish cannot be obtained or adverse impacts affect the small wild populations. In total, ~ 550 adult and subadult and ~ 500 juveniles from the year classes 2018-2025 from both the LIFE-Sterlet and the LIFE-Boat4 Sturgeon project are maintained as of yet. In total, 22 maternal families comprised of 22 females and 23 males are kept. All fish are tagged and a mating scheme for the F1 was developed.

Table 2: Release data of sterlet until Oct. 2025, showing the release numbers of the different size classes and used tagging methods. PIT (Passive Integrated Transponder), Floy (T-bar anchor tags), telemetry (active tags sending a radio or acoustic signal), VIE (Visible Implant Elastomer).

2025 LB4S	larvae	feeding fry	3 -5 cm	5 -10 cm	10 -15 cm	15 -20 cm	20 -30 cm	30 -40 cm	40-50 cm	50 -60 cm	60 -70 cm	70 -80 cm	80 -90 cm	90 -100 cm	>100 cm	TOTAL	PIT	Floy	Telemetry	VIE
BOKU																				
Wachau	15500	5100	1400	2730	2600	400	550	5								28285	5			955
Altenwörth - Greifenstein	10000															10000				
Greifenstein-Freudenau	3.000			150	60		122	58	19	7	6	2	1			3425	143			107
Nationalpark Donauauen	6300	4400	1100	2700		200	298		8	6	3					15015	115			515
Gabčíkovo																0				
March	7700	500														8200				
Asten																0				
Traisen																0				
Mura		6000					300									6300				150
Marchfeldkanal			300		400	450										1150				450
Vilshofen							993									993	993			993
BOKU TOTAL	42500	16000	2800	5580	3060	1050	2263	63	27	13	9	2	1			73368	1256			3170
HAKI																				
Körös	50.000															50000				
Tisza	100.000															100000				
HAKI TOTAL	150.000															150.000				
TOTAL	**192.500**	**16.000**	**2.800**	**5.580**	**3.060**	**1.050**	**1.963**	**63**	**27**	**13**	**9**	**2**	**1**			**223.068**	**1.256**			**3.020**

Table 3: Release data of Russian sturgeon in 2025, showing the release numbers of the different size classes and used tagging methods. PIT (Passive Integrated Transponder), Floy (T-bar anchor tags), telemetry (active tags sending a radio or acoustic signal), VIE (Visible Implant Elastomer)

2025 LB4S	larvae	feeding fry	3 -5 cm	5 -10 cm	10 -15 cm	15 -20 cm	20 -30 cm	30 -40 cm	40-50 cm	50 -60 cm	60 -70 cm	70 -80 cm	80 -90 cm	90 -100 cm	>100 cm	TOTAL	PIT	Floy	Telemetry	VIE
Wachau	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			0
Greifenstein-Freudenau	35700	1000	0	0	0	30	1	50	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	36781	0			0
Nationalpark Donauauen	14600	0	20	0	0	0	3	607	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	15234	227			609
March	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			0
Asten	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			0
Traisen	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			0
Mura	2500	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2500	1			0
RO Gruia	0	55300	0	0	0	0	31	220	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	55551	97			251
RO Fetesti	0	0	1400	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1401	1			1
RO Issacea	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3286	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3286	586			3286
BG Belene	0	0	0	300	2250	4020	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6570	0			6000
TOTAL	52800	56300	1420	300	2250	4050	35	4163	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	121323	912	0	0	10147

T.2.3 Rearing & reproduction & T 2.4 Rearing & Release

Sterlet

In 2025, the eggs of two wild females from the population east of Vienna, one female from the population below the hydropower plant Jochenstein, as well as four F1 (first filial generation) females were fertilized with the sperm of two Jochenstein wild males and eleven F1 males, resulting in approx. 200,000 fertilized eggs. As a back-up, 30,000 fertilized eggs were obtained from MATE AKI HAKI.

Figure 7: Sterlet larvae ©RAFFEINER REPUTATION/APA-Fotoservice

Over 73,000 sterlets were released into the Upper Danube and tributaries (Table 2). About 6,000 sterlet larvae were handed over to Revivo and released into the Mura River in May 2025. Altogether, the goal of 300,000 sterlets to be released in the Upper Danube has already been achieved and will be surpassed in the coming years. Together with the previous LIFE-Sterlet project, more than 540,000 sterlets were released. Ultrasound assessment of the mature broodstock was done in the beginning of November 2025.

Figure 8: Reproduction of a Russian Sturgeon - egg collection. © BOKU-IHG

Russian Sturgeon

The first successful reproduction of Russian sturgeon took place in May 2025. Three out of four gravid females ovulated, and the eggs were fertilized with the sperm of five males, resulting in approx. 190,000 fertilized eggs. As it takes the females two years on average to develop the next batch of oocytes, the four females have been transferred to a holding pond for the next year. An ultrasound assessment was done in the beginning of November 2025 for the remaining 11 mature females for the reproduction in spring 2026.

Over 120,000 Russian sturgeons were released into selected Danube stretches (Table 3).

Figure 9: Released Russian sturgeon in Romania 2025. © BOKU-IHG

Stellate sturgeon

In 2025, only one female was gravid. While the eggs which were obtained and very high-quality sperm of three males were used for fertilization, the eggs did not develop. It is assumed that the reproduction was 1 -2 weeks too early and the eggs were not fully ripe. The female was transferred to a holding pond together with the Russian sturgeon females. An ultrasound assessment of the remaining mature females was done in the beginning of November 2025 for the reproduction in spring 2026.

Beluga sturgeon

As of 2025, no gravid beluga sturgeon was observed at the Austrian facilities. With most of the large animals being kept at the BEN MATE AKI HAKI, assessment with the ultrasound commenced at the end of November 2025 to check for potential reproduction in 2026.

WP 3 – Ex situ HU

T.3.1 Maintenance of backup broodstock holding & construction of juvenile rearing system

Major milestones were achieved by April 2025, including the completion of the concrete tanks. In May 2025, water retention tests were successfully carried out.
A one-month trial period was implemented between mid-June and mid-July 2025. By this stage, all essential system components had been completed inlcuding:

- Water intake point
- Gravity channel
- Reservoir and setting tank
- Drum filter pits
- Nine juvenile rearing tanks
- Fishing pit

During the trial phase, some minor construction errors were identified and required correction. Furthermore, additional works were ongoing, such as electrical installations, road construction, and the installation of a three piece rail system, ensuring controlled rearing conditions for sturgeon juveniles by providing shade from direct sunlight and protection against predatory animals.
A need for an office and storage container equipped with a sanitary facility was identified. Additional work (e.g., container installation) was proposed, but procurement staff deemed them unfeasible under the original contract, suggesting a new procurement instead. Minor financial reallocations were requested from the project coordinator to initiate a new public procurement procedure for the installation of the containers at the work site, including their connection to the power supply, water line, and wastewater pit.
During the implementation phase, some additional works were identified that exceeded the technical scope of the original contract. Consequently, a contract amendment was required to ensure the proper and complete execution of the construction works.
The following technical modifications and additions were included in the construction contract amendment:

- Modifications to electrical connections and new lighting at the main entrance;
- Adjustment of the gravity pipeline routing to improve water flow and to allow for potential future development at the site;
- Technical changes to shaft construction and elevation to align with operational water levels;
- Renovation of the access road to the juvenile rearing system and paving it with crushed stone.

These changes are to be covered from the contingency budget after contract modification. Procurement, installation, and utility connection of service containers will occur under a separate public procurement process.

Figure 10: Juvenile rearing facility in Hungary. © MATE AKI HAKI

Block chain database for genetic and biotic data

Extensive work started in October 2024, to develop a database especially for *ex-situ* conservation. In December 2024, the frame was developed for the database manager. By the end of March 2025, GIS-based mapping began for relevant areas (in Szarvas, Hungary), enabling spatial visualization of data with integrated database filtering options.

As part of the digital infrastructure development, the input format for the *ex-situ* fish database was finalized to support Microsoft Excel table integration, facilitating easier and more efficient data entry and processing.

Most of the previous monitoring data, including spring 2025 – representing the latest dataset – were successfully uploaded into the database. Additionally, the completed sturgeon juvenile rearing facility was integrated into the GIS-based mapping interface, enhancing the spatial visualization and management of *ex-situ* conservation sites.

The development of the database is still in progress. The fine-tuning of the data structure and the preparation of analytical tools to detect relationships within the dataset are currently underway. In addition, the database will be further expanded to manage release and catch datasets, including geolocation information. The completion of the first phase of this activity is planned for April 2026.

T.3.2 Collection of broodstock

Details about the collection of broodstock see WP 2.

In February 2025, 12 Russian sturgeons were procured and transported from Danube Research Consulting Ltd. (Romania) to the MATE AKI HAKI *ex-situ* facility.

At present, the *ex-situ* conservation site maintains the following sturgeon broodstock:

- Sterlet (*Acipenser ruthenus*) – 190 broodstock individuals representing five year classes (2009–2018), with a total biomass of 725 kg;

- Russian sturgeon (*Acipenser gueldenstaedtii*) – 50 broodstock individuals representing three year classes (2009–2016), with a total biomass of 540 kg. The origin of 37 individuals remains to be validated;
- Beluga sturgeon (*Huso huso*) – 7 broodstock individuals from the 2008 year class, with a total biomass of 355 kg; In addition a share of BOKU´s fish is held at the HAKI facilities;
- Stellate sturgeon (*Acipenser stellatus*) – 20 mature individual of Danube origin and 3 broodstock individuals from the 2010 year class. The origin remains to be validated;
- In addition, several fish from BOKU-IHG are also currently kept at the facilities of MATE AKI HAKI.

T.3.3 Rearing and reproduction of broodstock

In 2025, the production of sterlets exceeded 400,000 fertilized sterlet eggs. 30,000 fertilized eggs were transferred to BOKU-IHG, and an additional 30,000 eggs were reared on site at the MATE AKI HAKI facility.

The reproduction of one gravid beluga sturgeon female did not yield fertilized eggs in 2025.

Cryoconservation

Cryopreservation activity commenced in spring 2025. A total of seven beluga sturgeon males were hormonally induced on the 7th of March 2025, followed by sperm collection attempts on the 9th and 10th March. Sperm was successfully obtained from two of the seven specimens. In both cases, the sperm motility was high (> 90 %), and 100 ml sperm of each individual was cryopreserved.

T.3.4. Rearing and releases of juveniles

In total, 150,000 sterlet larvae were released at multiple locations in the Tisza and Körös River (Table 2).

WP 4 – Ex situ SI

T.4.1 Construction of the hatchery container

By early 2025, all permits required to begin the construction of the hatchery on the banks of the Mura River in Apače had been obtained, and work commenced. During the summer, unforeseen delays arose when groundwater flooded the 8-meter-deep water pump shaft and surrounding sediment began to slip, requiring additional work and specialized equipment. Consequently, the cost of the groundwork increased, and the timeline was extended by approximately a month and a half, until mid-September.
By October 2025, all major construction work for the hatchery had been completed, including the installation of the water supply connection from the Mura River to the site where the hatchery container will be placed. The final step is to organize the transport of the container from Germany to its designated location. The container will be installed by the end of 2025 and ready for operation in spring 2026.

WP 5 – Monitoring

LIFE-Boat4Sturgeon is in close contact with other European initiatives and projects targeting Danube-Sturgeons. The goal is to pool knowledge, coordinate monitoring approaches, and make use of synergies between the projects. Below are brief descriptions of several projects and initiatives that work directly in cooperation with the project.

T.5.1. Sturgeon Monitoring Network

Habitat & Population Monitoring of European Sturgeons - Supporting Conservation Actions to implement the Pan-European Action Plan ("SCUTE")

The project "Habitat & Population Monitoring of European Sturgeons – Supporting Conservation Actions to implement the Pan-European Action Plan" is in line with the Pan-European Action Plan for sturgeon (PANEUAP) and assessed existing knowledge on sturgeon habitats and migration obstacles on a European-wide scale and developed guidelines for habitat monitoring and population monitoring. A comprehensive report on bycatch of sturgeon in commercial and recreational fisheries was compiled and includes best practice examples to protect sturgeon from being bycatch. Furthermore, a technical guideline for *ex-situ* breeding and release programs was developed. Findings and deliverables were presented at intersectoral meetings in key regions to garner increased stakeholder support.

The guidelines provide standardized methodologies for the assessment of sturgeon habitats and population parameters based on life-cycle stages for all European species and will be applicable throughout Europe and beyond. Together with the population monitoring guideline, a datasheet and field-protocol were provided. Both are based on the datasheet and field-protocol of the LIFE-Boat4Sturgeon project. The extended datasheets and protocols from SCUTE will be used in future population monitoring in the LIFE-Boat4Sturgeon project and were the basis for the international databases that will be hosted by the ICPDR (International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River) (see MonStur in the Danube project).

"Establishing, testing and launching a transboundary system for Monitoring Sturgeons, to manage and safeguard migratory fish in the Danube River Basin" (MonStur in the Danube)

The key ambition of MonStur in the Danube is to build a genuinely transnational and sustainable sturgeon monitoring system, capable of combining existing information from previous projects with new data generated during the project and in the future. This would result in a first-of-a-kind Danube River Basin-wide collection of population data, gathered from currently scattered datasets and considering sturgeons' entire geographic ranges, hosted by a neutral institution, the ICPDR. It would also include a habitat inventory, updating and expanding the dataset of the DTP (Danube Transnational Programme) MEASURES project, and adding additional information (i.e., abiotic parameters), vital for the legitimate description and understanding of habitats.

The main goals and aims are to set up a sturgeon monitoring system as a joint tool to be tested by partners (population & habitat monitoring), to enhance sustainability via cooperation and

commitment of policymakers, expert institutions and other stakeholders, and to close critical knowledge gaps through the application of innovative field techniques for habitat monitoring, leading to new, effective policies (Upper Danube Sturgeon Action Plan, Recommendations for infrastructure planning).
The definition of database specifications and the collection of the population data in the MonStur in the Danube project is based on the work already done in the LIFEBoat4Sturgeon project. Additionally, the LIFEBoat4Sturgeon will provide all the data collected during the project for the newly established database hosted by the ICPDR. The standardization of monitoring practices elaborated in the guidelines of the SCUTE project and implemented in the LIFEBoat4Sturgeon project will be paramount to ensure comparability among collected data from different research institutions that will be collected and added into the ICPDR database. Habitat surveys conducted through the MonStur project in the Danube will benefit from the knowledge of the LIFEBoat4Sturgeon project's monitoring activities because they revealed actual sturgeon habitats.

Joint Danube Survey 5 (JDS 5)
The LIFEBoat4Sturgeon team contributed with presentations and field work applications to both the fish sampling, as well as to the sturgeon sampling and data collection approach. The goal of the sturgeon group is to contribute to the JDS5 reporting via data collection and analysis of sturgeon data that was gathered in the 5-year period between JDS4 and JDS5 in the Danube region.

Institute of Marine Biology Odessa
Currently, a memorandum of understanding between the LIFEBoat4Sturgeon and the Institute of Marine Biology in Odessa is being established, to ensure knowledge and data exchange regarding sturgeon monitoring activities in Ukraine.

T.5.2 eDNA survey

The results of the survey in October 2023 indicated that the current methodology and evaluation of the eDNA sampling were not sensitive enough to detect low-level occurrences of sterlets.
As a result, the methodology will be further refined during the project, in collaboration with Alpenfisch – Fischzuchtbetrieb und Technisches Büro für Biologie (Limnologie) by Dr. Josef Wanzenböck. The goal is to develop specific genetic markers that exclusively target sterlet DNA, thereby increasing detection sensitivity. The primer development includes:

- Literature research regarding previously published primer/probe assays for the detection of *A. ruthenus* and other sturgeon species;
- Creation of a database of complete mitogenomes of all sturgeon species and all Danube species (if available in databases, e.g., NCBI);
- DNA extraction from tissue samples of various sturgeon species (provided by T. Friedrich and J. Neuburg), DNA extraction from water samples (*A. ruthenus* basin);
- Primer development and validation in silico using GeniousPrime software;
- Specificity testing of primers using ddPCR (droplet digital polymerase chain reaction) on as many sturgeon DNA extracts as possible (*A. stellatus*, *A. baerii*, *A. nudiventris*, etc.);

- Specificity testing using ddPCR in spiked environmental DNA samples, analysis of LOQ and LOD (limit of quantification and limit of detection);
- Creation of a comprehensive report.

Once these markers are finalized, the second sampling campaign will be conducted in the Danube (the goal is 2026).

T.5.3 Population assessment-capture- recapture

Austria

Between February and May 2025, a total of nine nights were spent on net monitoring. Altogether, nine fish were captured, three of them being fish from the 2024 year-class released close to the hatchery station the day before and, therefore, evidently passed the hydropower plant Freudenau. The autumn monitoring will be conducted between September and November. Starting with autumn 2025, the monitoring conducted in Austria will be adapted to overcome the shortcoming of incomplete coverage of the area downstream of the HPP Freudenau. Until now, only the area directly below the HPP was surveyed. From 2025 on, the entire area including the National Park stretch, which was used to some extent documented by the telemetry study conducted in the LIFE-Sterlet project and angling captures in the area, will be covered in a standardized monitoring approach. This shall extend the knowledge about habitat use, use of the entire stretch, and increase the chances of capturing YOY fish (the captures of 2024 confirmed their presence). The monitoring concept was elaborated together with Dr. James Crossman and Dr. Tim Haxton, both members of the scientific advisory board. One employee of the Austrian team joined Dr. James Crossman at the Columbia River White sturgeon monitoring program to gather experience about sturgeon population monitoring that can be applied in the LIFEBoat4Sturgeon project.

Figure 11: Capture of two sterlets during net monitoring. © BOKU-IHG

Slovakia

In 2025, no sterlet monitoring was conducted in spring. The reason was an agreement between the LIFEBoat4Sturgeon and LIFE Living Rivers projects not to endanger the sterlets with telemetry tags and risk unintentional captures which could interfere with the telemetry study. However, the effort that was not spent on monitoring in 2025 will be incorporated in the next years.

Hungary

The monitoring in Hungary started in 2025. A concept was elaborated between MATE AKI HAKI and BOKU with the goal to cover both the Tisza and Körös in spring and autumn using an electrified bottom trawl and static trammel nets. The goal was the establishment of a standardized monitoring scheme that covers parts of both rivers and is reproducible and comparable between years. The methodology is in line with the developed population monitoring guideline (SCUTE project), and the data collection and collection of genetic samples allows for comparable analyses with other monitoring activities in the project.

The use of the electrified bottom trawl instead of drifted trammel nets is the only way to cover large areas in the Körös and Tisza rivers. In contrast to the Danube, both rivers are smaller, slow flowing and contain a lot of woody debris, which makes drifting with trammel nets impossible. MATE AKI HAKI already conducted surveys using the electrified bottom trawl successfully in some parts of both rivers during other projects. The additional use of static trammel nets in areas where static nets can be deployed will complement the electrified bottom trawl to ensure all areas that can be sampled will be covered.

The spring sampling was successfully conducted and 25 sterlets could be captured in the Tisza but no sterlet was captured in the Körös using the electrified bottom trawl. Four of the 25 fish were between 2-7 cm, indicating successful natural reproduction.

Romania

A draft of the Term of References for monitoring activities has been developed in May – June 2025 and will be sent to potential collaborators by WWF Romania. After successful contracting of a collaborator, the monitoring will start in 2026. The monitoring will follow the guideline for population monitoring (SCUTE project) and will therefore be comparable to other monitoring programs established within the LIFEBoat4Sturgeon project.

WWF-RO completed the tender for the sturgeon monitoring in September 2025. Invitations have been sent to 5 entities, institutes or private companies that could provide such services: DDNI, S.C. Acva Science SRL, Ecolodiversitas, Grigore Antipa Institute from Constanța and GeoEcoMar, also from Constanța. According to WWF procedures, at least five entities had to be invited to this tender. Unfortunately, three negative responses were received in writing, one by telephone (S.C. Acva Science SRL) and GeoEcoMar did not respond at all. Two of the responses, from INCDD and Ecolodiversitas, cited insufficient funds for 3-4 years of monitoring.

INCDD estimates that it needs €33,000 for one year of monitoring. As a result, the project funds would only be sufficient for one year. We are trying to find solutions either to supplement the funds or to find alternative activities that correspond to the project's objectives.

Moreover, WWF Romania is collecting sturgeon bycatch information from fishermen. The collection for 2025 is still ongoing and has not been reported and included in the LIFEBoat4Sturgeon database yet. Strikingly, the majority of reported bycatch belongs to the YOY age class. Moreover, a few individuals were identified as hybrids.

Bulgaria

In June 2025, the WWF BG team monitored sturgeons in the Gomotartsi area (Vidin), together with local fishermen. Ten sturgeons were recorded during the monitoring, all of which were juveniles or adult sterlets. No YOY specimens were registered during our visit to this area.

The Danube River had extremely low water levels and high temperatures, which led to abundant algae blooms and made it difficult to collect samples with fishing nets. Due to the accumulation of algae on the nets, it was impossible to use the same net for more than one sample collection within a two-day period. So, in July and August, the sampling was significantly reduced, with an average of 3-4 nets deployed per day.

During the July monitoring, one wild YOY sterlet was recorded. In August, two juvenile sterlets and one YOY Russian sturgeon were recorded. A genetic sample has been taken to determine whether it is from the restocking programme, or if it is a wild specimen.

WP 6 – In situ conservation

T.6.1 Strengthening law enforcement during time of releases 2022-2029

Romania

In April 2025, the international law enforcement workshop took place in Giurgiu. The meeting was attended by 10 representatives of law enforcement agencies in person and 9 representatives online. Agencies represented were Border Police (RO, BG, UA), fishing agencies (RO, BG, UA) and national police (RO).

Conclusions:

- The general perception was that the cooperation protocols are enough, as they offer the legal framework for good cooperation and common patrolling;
- There is a cooperation protocol between NAFA and EARA which focuses on common controls in the Black Sea;
- Bulgarian Border Police and Romanian Border Police carry out joint controls every month, 2 on water and 2 on land. Those on the water also include illegal fishing issues;
- Bulgarian Border Police and the Romanian Police through the Directorate of Transport Police are part of Aquapol (The European Association of Maritime Transport Police and Maritime Authorities), and they carry out 2 joint controls/month on transport safety and security, including illegal fishing issues. There are 7 stations in the common Romanian-Bulgarian sector;
- Bulgarian Border Police would need to have more precise sonars in order to better detect karmaki. The idea was embraced also by the Romanian Border Police, they thought it would be useful to have such equipment;
- Regarding the communication of the future sturgeon restocking, WWF offices could act as the main channel to announce to the control authorities about these actions.

A joint control together with NAFA was performed in February 2025, shortly before the stocking activity in Gruia. No poached sturgeon was registered.

Bulgaria

In March 2025, invitations were sent to the relevant agencies to attend a workshop on cross-border cooperation projects. Organized by WWF Romania, the workshop took place in April 2025. Representatives from the Bulgarian Border Police and the Executive Agency for Fisheries and Aquaculture (EAFA) participated in the meeting, where the possibility of increased joint or parallel patrols during the sturgeon release periods was discussed.

In the period January – June 2025, meetings were held with 30 representatives of two law enforcement agencies (the Executive Agency for Fisheries and Aquaculture and the Border Police), and two scientific institutes in Bulgaria. The following topics were discussed during the meetings: 1. Signals for incorrectly labelled products of sturgeon or live sturgeons that are offered in the markets in their area of work and control, as well as possibilities for inspections of shops selling sturgeon/sturgeon products and correct identification of sturgeon species; 2. Which species are produced in the sturgeon farm in the region; 3. The possibility of removing the sterlet from the list of electronic fishing logbooks, since this species does not enter the

sea and these logbooks are only used in the Black Sea region, where the Stellate sturgeon is often known as sterlet, leading to incorrect sturgeon species being entered into the electronic system; 4. The possibility of training inspectors to identify sturgeons, to help them control fishing vessels and fish markets more easily; 5. Signals of poaching, inspections for illegal gear and confiscations.
In June 2025, during an anti-poaching operation in the Danube River near the town of Kozloduy, Border Police officers found 8 sturgeons caught with illegal fishing gear known as karmaci. Our team helped with the release of these sexually mature sturgeons. The largest was a 140 cm stellate sturgeon. The sturgeons' injuries were not life-threatening, and we hope that they will survive and be able to reproduce in the river.
With the permission of the Border Police, a short video was made during the pulling of the ropes with the hooks from the river. The video was shared on social media, with gratitude to the Border Police officers and a call of action to protect sturgeon and report registered cases of poaching.
Shortly afterwards, sturgeons were found during a second anti-poaching inspection near Svishtov. Due to ongoing investigations into the cases, the data (number of sturgeon specimens, sizes, and photos of the cases) are for internal use only.

Ukraine
On June 11, WWF-UA signed the Memorandum of Cooperation and Understanding with the Department of the State Agency for the Development of Land Reclamation, Fisheries and Food Programs in the Odessa Region (Odesa Fish Patrol).
On June 25-26, patrolling was organized in the Solomoniv arm and part of Ochakovske mouth together with Odesa Fish Patrol. The territory was defined based on the military requirements and permits from the UA Border Service.
In April 2025, the WWF-UA team and Odesa Fish Patrol officers and State Fishery Agency participated (online) in the international law enforcement workshop in Giurgiu organized by WWF-RO.

T.6.2 Securing fishermen support and reduce by-catch of released sturgeon 2022-2029

Romania
Two new fishing communities in Jurilovca and Sulina were visited. The community of Fetesti was visited and notified about stocking events.
A total number of 4 meetings were held with fishermen in 4 villages (Fetești, Galați, Jurilovca and Sulina), reaching 15 fishermen.

Bulgaria
Fishing communities in the Varna region in the Black Sea Area and in the Danube Region were visited. A total of 18 villages (7 in the Black Sea region, 11 in the Danube region) were visited and meetings with 73 fishermen were held. Data on 39 sturgeons that were caught as bycatch or were poached was collected.
Before and after the sturgeon restocking was carried out in Bulgaria and Romania in 2025, visits were made to target fishing communities to inform them about the restocking, and to

collect information on specimens caught as bycatch following the restocking. Several social media posts were published regarding the restocking, encouraging fishermen to report any relevant information, and to release any sturgeon caught accidentally. As a result, we received reports of sturgeon caught during the restocking process in Romania in early 2025 and in Bulgaria in July 2025.

Ukraine

The military situation caused the ban for meetings in Vylkovo town, so the meeting was conducted in Odesa city. It was organized together with a Danube Day activity (WP7). About 50 members of the community were reached.

WP 7 – Public relation & dissemniation

T.7.1 PR Strategy

Internships and research exchanges

Chiara Samassa, a PhD student from the University of Padova, joined the LIFE-Boat4Sturgeon team for a three-month research exchange. With a background in genetics, she contributed to the project's multidisciplinary efforts in sturgeon conservation, which require both fundamental and applied research across a range of scientific fields. During her stay, she focused extensively on sturgeon conservation and hatchery practices, gaining hands-on experience with the reproduction and larval rearing of several sturgeon species.

Her work involved capturing and sampling broodstock, determining their maturation using biometric and ultrasound methods, collecting and fertilizing eggs, and maintaining eggs and larvae. She actively participated in the artificial reproduction process and in the release of both adult and juvenile sturgeons into various sections of the Danube River. All those actions contribute to supporting international efforts to restore endangered sturgeon populations.

This exchange was made possible in part by financial support from the World Sturgeon Conservation Society (WSCS) Student Exchange Grant.

Four interns joined the team at the LIFE-Boat facility, each completing either a one-month internship (3) or a three-day work experience (1).

T.7.2 Media releases & products

Press overview

From the beginning of the project in autumn 2022 until the end of October 2025 over 570 media releases were documented.

- 424 online articles (221 in 2025)
- 86 printed articles (46 in 2025)
- 20 radio releases (10 in 2025)
- 29 TV broadcasts (17 in 2025)

Online articles

The following figures are a selection of the documented online articles.


oekonews.at vom 10.04.2025

Europas erste schwimmende Aufzuchtstation für Störe nimmt in Wien Fahrt auf

LIFE-Boat4Sturgeon: Meilenstein für den Artenschutz auf der Donau

Figure 12: Online article about the opening event of the LIFE-Boat on oekonews.at.


Allgemein Nachrichten aus der Veterinärmedizin + Fischkunde und Fischgesundheit

LIFE-Boat4Sturgeon nimmt den Betrieb auf

Am 10. April 2025 wurde die MS Negrelli feierlich als LIFE-Boat4Sturgeon in Dienst gestellt - ein Meilenstein für den Schutz der vom Aussterben bedrohten Donaustöre.

Figure 13: Online article about the opening event of the LIFE-Boat on vet-magazin.at


vet-magazin.at vom 20.05.2025

LIFE-Boat4Sturgeon: In Rumänien wurden erstmals 50.000 Störlarven in der Donau ausgesetzt

Die Aktion ist Teil der Bemühungen zur Wiederbesiedlung der Donau mit den wertvollen Störarten – eine Aufgabe, die im Rahmen des Projekts LIFE-Boat4Sturgeon übernommen wurde.

Figure 14: Online article about the release of Russian sturgeon in the Lower Danube in Romania on vet-magazin.at.

Printed articles

The following figures are a selection of the documented print articles.

KLIMAHELD DER WOCHE

Eine Zukunft für die Störe

Thomas Friedrich leitet ein Aufzucht-Projekt für die Donau-Riesen

VON VALENTIN **BAYER**

Beim Einkaufen in einer Zoohandlung verlor Thomas Friedrich als Jugendlicher sein Herz an einen Stör: „Ich war sofort fasziniert, habe eisern gespart und ihn gekauft." Ebenso schnell wie der Fisch – er war rasch zu groß für das Aquarium, weshalb Friedrich im Garten seiner Eltern in Linz einen Teich anlegte – wuchs die Liebe des heute 39-Jährigen zu den imposanten Donaubewohnern. Mittlerweile leitet der Hydrobiologe, der an der Universität für Bodenkultur in Wien lehrt, das Aufzuchtprojekt „Life-Boat 4 Sturgeon": In Kooperation mit internationalen Partnern werden auf einem umgebauten Schiff bei der Donauinsel alle vier Stör-Arten, die in dem Fluss vorkommen, gezüchtet.

Durch die Verbauung der Donau und die Jagd wegen des wertvollen Kaviars sind die Tiere stark gefährdet. „Störe sind ein Erfolgsmodell der Natur, sie haben sich in rund 200 Millionen Jahren kaum verändert. Es wäre unendlich schade, wenn sie verschwinden", sagt Friedrich. Als „Indikatorarten" geben sie Aufschluss über den Zustand eines Ökosystems: Geht es den Stören gut, trifft das auch auf die meisten anderen Arten zu. „Je mehr Bausteine aus diesen Systemen herausfallen, desto eher brechen sie zusammen", sagt Friedrich.

Foto: privat

„Störe sind ein Erfolgsmodell der Natur, sie haben sich in rund 200 Millionen Jahren kaum verändert."

Thomas Friedrich, Hydrobiologe

Die Tiere werden auf der Donauinsel aufgezüchtet und – je nach ihrem natürlichen Lebensraum – in Deutschland, Österreich, Rumänien oder Bulgarien ausgesetzt. Die Muttertiere bleiben dauerhaft in der Zuchtstation, ihr Nachwuchs soll in Zukunft die Populationen in der Donau wieder stärken. „Das Schwierige ist, dass Störe sehr spät geschlechtsreif werden – es dauert also Jahre, bis die Effekte zu sehen sind", sagt Friedrich. Das Projekt wird von der EU gefördert, die Wiener arbeiten mit zehn Partnern in acht EU-Ländern zusammen.

Seine Leidenschaft teilt Friedrich mit seiner Frau: „Gerade erwarten wir unseren ersten Nachwuchs, aber sonst dreht sich kulinarisch, beim Fischen und Wandern alles um den Fisch."

Figure 15: Print article about the "climate hero of the week" in the OÖ Nachrichten

Stör-Nachwuchs in der Donau

In der neuen Aufzuchtstation der Boku sollen Millionen Fische schlüpfen

VON LAURA RIEGER

Während Babys im Krankenhaus geboren werden, kommt die Brut der Störe auf Schiffen zur Welt – zumindest jene, die im Rahmen des Boku-Forschungsprojekts „LIFE-Boat4Sturgeon" schlüpfen. Denn die Projektverantwortlichen haben es sich zur Aufgabe gemacht, die vom Aussterben bedrohten Donaustöre zu schützen.

Gelingen soll das auf der extra umgebauten MS Negrelli, die als Transportschiff der staatlichen Gesellschaft „via donau" unterwegs war. Auf dem 66 Meter langen und 10 Meter breiten Schiff befinden sich insgesamt 35 Aufzuchtbecken – ein großes Mutterfischbecken mit 110 Kubikmetern, zwölf Rundbecken und 22 Langstromrinnen. Bis 2030 sollen rund 1,6 Millionen Jungtiere aufgezogen und freigelassen werden. Erste Auswilderungen fanden bereits statt. Das Boot legte zwar bereits im Jänner an der Donau an, nach letzten Arbeiten wurde die Aufzuchtstation nun feierlich eröffnet. Das freut die zuständige Stadträtin, Ulli Sima (SPÖ): „Mit dem LIFE-Boat-4Sturgeon auf der Donauinsel schaffen wir eine Infrastruktur, die den Schutz bedrohter Arten aktiv unterstützt. Gleichzeitig ermöglicht es Wienerinnen und Wienern, das Projekt hautnah zu erleben".

Die umgebaute MS Negrelli legte an der Donau an. Foto: Raffelner Reputation

Störe hautnah erleben

Störe sind in Wien allerdings nichts Neues. Die Donau zählt seit 200 Millionen Jahren zu ihrem natürlichen Habitat. Diverse Gründe wie Überfischung oder Lebensraumverlust haben dazu geführt, dass mittlerweile zwei von sechs Arten ausgestorben sind. „Einmal ausgestorben, sind Arten für immer verloren. Umso mehr freut es uns, beim Projekt LIFE-Boat4Sturgeon die wissenschaftliche Leitung zu übernehmen", sagt die Boku-Rektorin, Eva Schulev-Steindl. Die Projektkosten belaufen sich auf rund 11,8 Millionen Euro, wovon 67 Prozent das EU-Programm LIFE übernimmt. Wer bei der Aufzucht hinter die Kulissen blicken will, hat ab Sommer bei Führungen die Chance. Infos gibt es unter www.lb4sturgeon.eu

Mit einer Rätselrallye Döbling erkunden

Alle Entdecker und Detektive in Döbling aufgepasst, denn jetzt wird eine gute Spürnase gebraucht! Die Grätzl-Rallye für die Kleinen bietet spannende Rätsel. Dabei können Kinder den Bezirk erkunden und ihr eigenes Grätzl besser kennenlernen. Mit spielerischen Aufgaben rückt man der Lösung des Rätsels Stück für Stück näher. Es gibt zwei Schwierigkeitslevel für die Altersgruppen 6 bis 11 Jahre. Die Rätselhefte kann man unter www.diestadtunddu.at kostenlos runterladen. (as)

Figure 16: Print article about the project in MeinBezirk Döbling.

Konstruktive „Stör-Aktion“ auf dem Donauschiff „MS Negrelli“

Donaustadt. Zu Besuch auf Europas erster schwimmenden Aufzuchtstation.

Von Uwe Mauch

Es ist bereits das dritte Leben des Motorschiffs „Negrelli“, das in seinem sechzigsten Frühling vor Wien ankert: Wo in seinem ersten Leben Steine transportiert wurden, schwimmen heute Störe, die vom Aussterben bedroht sind. Wo im zweiten Leben vor allem Events stattfanden, werkt seit einigen Tagen der Fischerei-Biologe und Fischmeister Thomas Friedrich mit seinem Team.

„Arche Noah“ für Fische

Friedrich, Forscher an der Universität für Bodenkultur (Boku), arbeitet auf dem aufwendig umgebauten Frachtkahn im Auftrag eines großen, von der EU, der Stadt Wien, des Landwirtschaftsministeriums und der „viadonau“ geförderten Stör-Rettungsprojekts.

Der Biologe steht neben einem großen

UWE MAUCH

UWE MAUCH

Er rettet schon seit seiner Kindheit Fische: Thomas Friedrich.

Figure 17: Print article about the project in “ Kurier”.

LIFE-Boat4Sturgeon Feierliche Eröffnung der MS Negrelli

Europas erste schwimmende Aufzuchtstation für Störe eröffnet auf der Donau in Wien. Bis 2030 sollen rund 1,6 Mio. Jungfische aufgezogen und ausgewildert werden.

Am 10. April 2025 wurde die MS Negrelli feierlich als LIFE-Boat4Sturgeon eröffnet, ein bedeutender Schritt zum Schutz der vom Aussterben bedrohten Donaustöre. Das Schiff des österreichischen Wasserstraßenbetreibers viadonau hat an der neuen Anlegestelle auf der Donauinsel in Wien festgemacht und wird in den kommenden Jahren als einzige schwimmende Aufzuchtstation in Europa eine zentrale Rolle bei der Erhaltung der letzten vier Störarten der Donau spielen. Das BMLUK investiert rund 1 Million Euro in das Projekt, mit dem Ziel, bis 2030 rund 1,6 Millionen Jungfische aufzuziehen und in verschiedenen Donauabschnitten auszuwildern.

Gemeinsam für den Schutz der Donaustöre

Störe, die seit über 200 Millionen Jahren Teil des Ökosystems sind, stehen vor der Gefahr des Aussterbens. Dieses Projekt setzt einen bedeutenden Schritt, um die vom Aussterben bedrohten Störe wieder in ihren natürlichen Lebensraum zurückzubringen und somit die Artenvielfalt in der Donau zu bewahren.

»Die Eröffnung der MS Negrelli ist ein wegweisender Moment für den Schutz der Donaustöre und die Erhaltung unserer Gewässer. Als Präsident des Österreichischen Kuratoriums für Fischerei und Gewässerschutz sehe ich in diesem Projekt eine einzigartige Chance, das Bewusstsein für die Bedeutung unserer heimischen Fischarten zu schärfen. Gemeinsam können wir nicht nur die letzten Störarten der Donau retten, sondern auch ein starkes Zeichen für den Schutz unserer wertvollen Wasserressourcen setzen. Es ist unsere Verantwortung, das Erbe der Donau für zukünftige Generationen zu bewahren«, so ÖKF Präsident Heinz Heistinger.

Eröffnung LIFE-Boat4Sturgeon MS Negrelli. Projektleiter Thomas Friedrich (BOKU), Stadträtin Ulli Sima (Stadt Wien), Wasser-Sektionschefin Monika Mörth (BMLUK), Rektorin Eva Schulev-Steindl (BOKU), Sektionschefin Vera Hofbauer (BMIMI), Geschäftsführer Hans-Peter Hasenbichler (viadonau) mit Vertretern der Projektbeteiligten und der Angelfischerei. ©APA-Fotoservice | Mirjam Reither

Figure 18: Print article about the opening event of the LIFE-Boat in "Österreichs Fischerei".


NOTA BENE

„Samica vyprodukuje kaviár s hmotnosťou 10 až 20 % svojho tela, a kilogram kaviáru vyzy veľkej stoji 7 až 10 000 eur."

Dunaj je pyšlacrvo vraj rozlúrené enormne. Vyzy veľké, ktoré tam volajú belugy, sú pre chudobných rybárov poľehnaním. „Za niekoľkometrovú vyzu môžu dostať tuľko, čo zarobia za celý rok," hovorí Thomas. „Ide o sociálny problém: ak človek nemá možnosť zarobiť si inak, z tzutu vidí možnosť, ako zabezpečiť svoju rodinu, je prenho ľahké loviť tieto ryby napriek do Dunaja, aj keď chcel pôvodne ulovil niečo iné a vyzu ulovil náhodou."

AKO PREŽIŤ PRIEHRADAMI

Rodičovské ryby získali do projektu z rybích farieb v Rumunsku, Bulharsku a Taliansku. Mnohé z nich nejdú stále ryby, ktoré ledyel ligálne vylovili z Dunaja, alebo ich potomkov. Každú najprv genetickú skontrolovali, či nemajú príbuzku z Dunaja alebo ju previezli z Kaspického mora. Snažili sa aj nemať veľa sprbuzenných rýb, aby bola budúca populácia geneticky čo najpestrejšia.

Ryby potom vykupovali. Niektorí majitelia kaviárových farieb boli nápomocní, pre iných to bol tvrdý trimis. Jedna samica vyprodukuje kaviár a hmotnosťou 10 až 20 % svojho tela, a kilogram kaviáru vyzy veľkej stoji 7 až 10 000 eur. „Takže cenu 15 000 eur za takú rybu môžeme považovať za dobrú," konštatuje Thomas.

Za mysvich druhov, ktoré vo Viedni odchovávajú – vyza veľká, jesetor ruský, hviezdnatý a malý, nemigruje do Čierneho mora len jesetor malý. Životný cyklus ostatných v minulosti zahŕňal cestu z pobrežných oblastí Čierneho mora hore prúdom Dunaja až na územie dnešného Slovenska, Rakúska a nemeckého Bavorska. Tam sa ryby narodili, rozmnožovali a potom sa vracali do mora. Rovnaký pár podmorpovali mladé, aby sa potom, keď dosiahnu dospelosť, opäť vracali na horný tok ďaľ život ďalšej generácii. Jesetor malý sa zas presúval v dunajskom toku, ako chcel.

Migrácia zastavili priehrady. Iste, existujú rybochody, ale. „Žiadny z nich nie je vhodný pre jesetory," vysvetľuje Thomas. „Iba veľkí a ni to ryby veľkej rieky. To znamená, že rady rozmiestnili v hlbokých miestach. Do malého umelého prúdu nevplávajú, akokoľvek dobrý je pre iné dunajské druhy ryb. Takže potrebujeme

špecifické vybavenie." Tie technické riešenia vraj už existujú. Napríklad rybie výťahy. Je to však veľká investícia a kým ich nej perviditkovateľne elektrární nedorľadí nikom, sami od seba je prirodzpodobne nepodarujú. „K tomu treba myslieť na migráciu doľu prúdom," pokračuje Thomas. „Niektré ryby nejprejdú turbínami, rozmlnú by ich." On sám je optimistický. Vraj musí byť. Veri tomuto projektu a dúfa, že keď budú ryby, ktoré vypúšťajú do rieky teraz, dospelé, prídu by budú mať pre ne riešenie.

Figure 19: Article about the project in the Slovakian magazine "Nota Bene".

Der Hausen ist der Fisch des Jahres 2025

Wird man den Hausen und andere große Störarten wieder in der Donau erleben können?

Bei manchen Fischen ist es fünf vor zwölf, beim Hausen ist es fünf nach zwölf! Gerade deswegen wurde er zum Fisch des Jahres 2025 gewählt. Er steht somit stellvertretend für alle gefährdeten europäischen Störartigen.

Die Donau ist die Heimat von sechs verschiedenen Störarten – sie alle sind in ihrem Bestand stark gefährdet bzw. teilweise bereits ausgestorben. Durch Überfischung in den vergangenen Jahrhunderten wurden sie in der Oberen Donau beinahe ausgerottet. Die Errichtung von Kraftwerken und Staustufen machte den Restpopulationen eine Laichwanderung unmöglich. Im unteren Bereich der Donau wurden mit der Errichtung der Staustufen am Eisernen Tor längere Laichzüge unterbunden. Der Hausen (*Huso huso*) zählt zu den Langdistanzwanderern, der vom Schwarzen Meer aus Laichmigrationen bis in die Obere Donau durchführte.

Diese Laichzüge der weit über 500 Kilogramm schwer und durchschnittlich sechs bis sieben Meter lang werdenden Hausen stellten eine wichtige Nahrungsressource für die Menschen entlang der Donau dar. Der Hausen, der auch Beluga-Stör genannt wird, laicht im Abstand von nur drei bis fünf Jahren.

Aktuell vermehrt sich der Hausen noch sporadisch in der Unteren Donau zwischen den Kraftwerken am Eisernen Tor und dem Donaudelta. Die Bestände sind jedoch sehr klein und unterliegen nach wie vor einer starken Wilderei. Eine eigenständige Erholung ist aufgrund der Populationsgröße nicht zu erwarten.

Der Hausen ist vom Aussterben bedroht. Foto: BOKU

Aufzuchtprogramm

Nun werden in Wien im Rahmen des LIFE-Boat4Sturgeon-Projekts genetisch donaustämmige Hausen, Waxdick und Sternhausen in einer schwimmenden Aufzuchtstation vermehrt und die im Donauwasser aufgezogenen Jungfische zur Stärkung der Population anschließend in der Unteren Donau besetzt. Daneben gibt es bereits Planungen für störtaugliche Fischwanderhilfen an den Kraftwerken am Eisernen Tor und in Gabcikovo.

Es ist also zu hoffen, dass die auf das „Wiener Wasser" geprägten Störe nach Erreichen der Geschlechtsreife in zwölf bis 20 Jahren funktionstüchtige Fischauf- und -abstiegsanlagen vorfinden, um die österreichische Donau zu erreichen und auch die Kraftwerke in Österreich mit entsprechenden Wanderhilfen nachgerüstet werden. Als Botschafter für den gesunden Umgang und die Renaturierung des Ökosystems Donau verdient der Hausen Aufmerksamkeit und ist ein mahnendes Beispiel für das schleichende Aussterben der heimischen Fischarten.

Ein Beitrag der der Sonderthemen-Redaktion (st@nachrichten.at).

ENTGELTLICHE EINSCHALTUNG

Figure 20: Article about the project and the beluga sturgeon in "OÖ Nachrichten".

Radio contributions

Thomas Friedrich und das LIFE-Boat 4 Sturgeon: Der Kampf um das Überleben einer Art. Der BOKU-Experte erzählt uns in einem Videocast (bzw. parallel auch Podcast) Wissenwertes über die „Saurier unter den Fischen".
www.riverandnaturetrust.org/thomas-friedrich-und-das-lifeboat-4-sturgeon-der-kampf-um-das-ueberleben-einer-art/

Foto: RNT

Figure 21: Podcast about sturgeons and the project on "River and nature trust".

TV contributions

The hatchery station in Austria was visited by a few film teams from different channels e.g.,: ORF, Standard, W24 and Servus TV. Additionally, several videos were reported in the partner countries e.g.,: two TV contributions were documented in Romania about two release events. In Slovenia, a video about the construction start of the hatchery was released on Planet TV.

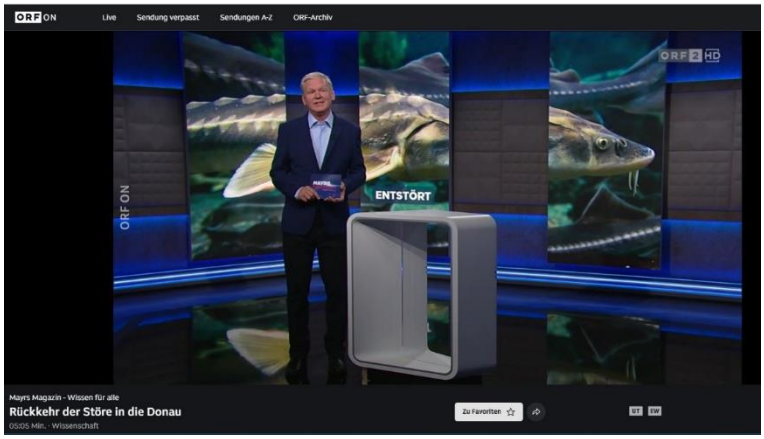

Figure 22: TV contribution on ORF 2 in the program "Mayrs Magazin".

Information boards Austria

Two information boards about the project were attached directly to the container on the mooring point at the hatchery location in AT. One board features information about the project and the Danube sturgeons, the other information about the sturgeon adoptions, caviar, report a catch and visitor information. The boards are in the CI Design with all the partner and co-financier logos, as well as the LIFE and Natura 2000 logos.

Figure 23. Information boards at the mooring point of the LIFE-Boat. © BOKU-IHG

T.7.3 Events & visitor information

In 2025, nine events were either organized by the project or involved project participation.

Opening Event 2025

On April 10, 2025, the official opening event of the Austrian hatchery facility on the MS Negrelli took place.

Figure 24: Opening event of the LIFE-Boat with from left to right: project coordinator Thomas Friedrich (BOKU), City councilor Ulli Sima, Head of Department Monika Mörth (BMLUK), Rector Eva Schulev-Steindl (BOKU), Head of Department Vera Hofbauer (BMIMI), Managing Director Hans-Peter Hasenbichler (viadonau). © viadonau/Zinner

Danube Day 2025

The Danube Day 2025 in Austria took place at the Nationalpark center schlossOrth of the Nationalpark Donau-Auen. Over 300 schoolchildren (age 8 - 10 years) attended this event. Additionally, the LIFE-Boat facility was visited by the public by four extra tours on this day.

Figure 25: Danube Day at the national park center schlossORTH of the Nationalpark Donauauen. © BOKU-IHG

Haus für Natur – Museum Lower Austria

Two beluga sturgeons were transferred from the LIFE-Boat facilities to the 125,000- liter Danube tank in the “Haus für Natur”, a museum for history and nature in St.Pölten, Lower Austria. The two individuals are of Danube origin and are part of the broodstock of the LIFE-Boat4Sturgeon project. However, both animals hatched in 2019 and therefore, have not reached maturity yet.

Figure 26: One of the beluga sturgeons in the Danube-tank in the "Haus für Natur". . © NÖ Museum Betriebs GmbH/Theo Kust

Visits to the hatchery station

Until the end of October 2025, the hatchery facility in Austria was visited by over 1,480 people from over 50 different institutions, including 20 primary school children, 41 pupils from higher schools and over 120 students from national or foreign universities.
Notable visits included delegations from the International Mayor Conference, the Cabinet of the Federal Ministry for Innovation, Mobility and Infrastructure, the Office of the Lower Austrian Provincial Government (Department WA2), the Danube LIFElines project consortium, the ICPDR, representatives of various river commissions, participants of the Sustainable Hydropower Conference, the Austrian Chamber of Agriculture, and the WWF Supervisory Board.
In total, 33 guided tours for the public were conducted, with 322 participants.

Tours at the Slovenian and Hungarian facilities will start in 2026.

T.7.4 Scientific dissemination

The project and its research were presented at 23 different occasions in 2025, including the North American Sturgeon and Paddlefish Society Conference, The Innovasea Acoustic Telemetry International Workshop and the ICPDR Monitoring & Assessment Expert Group meeting.

WP 8 – Sustainability

Sturgeon Adoptions

Since autumn 2023, there is the possibility to adopt one of the projects broodstock individuals. So far, 78 sturgeons have been adopted, namely 63 sterlets, nine stellate sturgeons, two Russian sturgeon and four beluga sturgeon. The donors received a certificate and a sturgeon plushie as a token of appreciation.