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Successful artificial reproduction of the European sea sturgeon



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Hope is renewed for the European sea sturgeon, a treasured species in the Gironde River, which populated most of Western Europe's rivers until the 19th century. Last week Cemagref announced the successful artificial reproduction of the European sea sturgeon, *Acipenser sturio*, using specimens raised in the wild. This is a strong symbol of safeguarding the biodiversity of Europe's rivers.

Despite its status as an endangered species in France since 1982 and in Europe since 1998, the last population of the European sea sturgeon has continued to decline. Today, only a few thousand individuals remain,

all native to the Gironde River. In Bordeaux, researchers were rushing to build up a breeding station in St-Seurin-sur-l'Isle, in the Gironde area.

Sturgeon fry under close surveillance

Since the 1990s and kept in captivity since that time. After more than 10 years of daily care and effort on the part of the research team, a female (Francine, born in 1994 and weighing 8.5 kg) and two males (Justin, born in 1984, 24 kg, and Emile, born in 1994, 17.6 kg) provided slightly more than 11,000 larvae.

The reproduction should provide a few thousand fry.

This is a species' preservation and restoration programme in Europe: one in France (the Cemagref) and one in Germany (the Leibniz Institute of Berlin). Depending on the success rearing these fry, the remainder should be released into the wild in the Garonne and Dordogne rivers, undoubtedly at the beginning of September, to sustain the wild population whose numbers are currently at their lowest.

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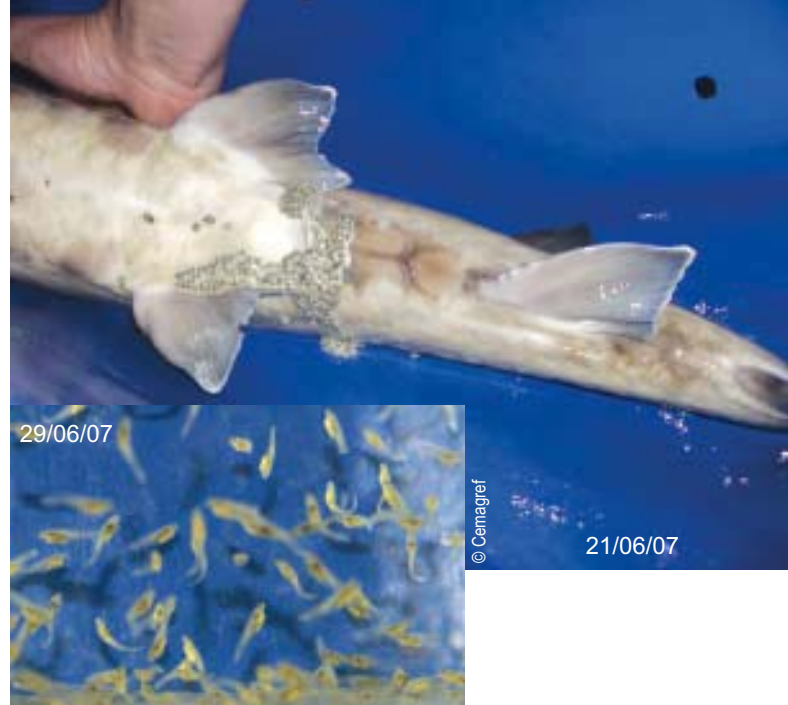
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How to stimulate reimplantation of the species

9000 larvae and fry were released into the wild in the Garonne and Dordogne rivers, thus reinforcing released during marking operations or accidental capture during their return to the rivers where a few have been. how effective these measures have been.

The sturgeon in captive stocks, progressively built up since the mid-1990s, are now approaching sexual maturity, demonstrates the soundness of this solution. It compensates the absence of rivers for reproduction. There is now reasonable hope that the coming years will see the return of the species.



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Partners united in a single objective: restore and protect the species

This highly encouraging result is the fruit of more than 20 years of research conducted in the wild and in captivity. This research has been carried out in the environment, the Aquitaine and Poitou-Charente regions, the Charente-Maritime and Gironde departments, and the Adour-Garonne Water Agency.

Work is currently coordinated by the WWF France within a consortium grouping the Garonne basin (the Dordogne river basin), SMEAG (the Garonne river basin) and SMIDDEST (the Gironde estuary) and the CNPMM (National Committee for Marine Fishery and Marine Fish Rearing).

Efforts have been made to raise awareness to this situation, aiming notably at preserving the habitats used by this species and at limiting accidental capture, through various campaigns and educational programs.

Maximum level of protection for the European sea sturgeon

The European sea sturgeon, *Acipenser sturio*, is a species that is strictly protected by several international agreements (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, the Bern Convention, the Convention on the Conservation of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic). A plan for preserving the species has been developed in the Garonne basin and the Gironde estuary.