

MEASURES

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Managing and restoring aquatic ecological corridors for migratory fish species in the Danube River basin



The Danube is a key lifeline in Europe connecting important bioregions, economies and cultures. Securing biodiversity is fundamental to human development and rivers are one of the most threatened ecosystems on our globe. Our project contributes to these challenges specifically for the Danube River in its role as an important ecological corridor connecting natural heritage sites and an organism group key to a sustainable future of the river, migratory fish including sturgeon species.

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Context

The Danube River and its tributaries are key migration routes for sturgeons and other migratory fish such as barbel and nase. These species are excellent bio-indicators for the quality of ecological corridors due to their specific needs during their life stages indicating habitat connectivity, and therefore the overall corridor quality.

Especially the long-distance migrating sturgeons represent a natural heritage of the entire Danube Region. Their dramatic decline in the last decades has become an issue of basin-wide importance, documented by the Danube countries and the European Commission.

Why are eco-corridors important to migratory fish?

Dams and hydropower plants present migration barriers and lead to the fragmentation of habitats for endangered fish. Migratory fish species are particularly affected by river fragmentation, being unable to move up or downstream between their required habitats (e.g. spawning – and feeding grounds etc.). Enhancing capacity at national and transnational level aims to strengthen the support for ecological corridors, migratory fish and their habitats beyond the project end. This is particularly relevant as future infrastructure projects might threaten the last remaining habitats and critical ecological corridors for migratory fish species.

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Ten countries unite for a common purpose

Ten countries along the Danube (Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Slovenia, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria and Ukraine) joined forces in an EU-funded project to conserve endangered migratory fish species in the Danube river basin by identifying and improving access to habitats and promoting the establishment of ecological corridors.

Thus, the MEASURES project intends to establish national nuclei for the conservation of migratory fish and their ecological corridors in the Danube countries in order to coordinate conservation efforts between existing programs and future legislations.

The overall objective is gaining and applying new knowledge on habitat availability added to the already existing information on migration barriers. Based on such new insights, harmonized transnational actions and standardized methodologies for migratory fish habitat management and conservation will be developed.

How can we reach this goal?

One of the main MEASURES project's aims is to establish transnational ecological corridors for improving migratory paths of endangered fish species in the Danube River Basin (DRB). How can we do that? By identifying protected habitats encompassed by the current network of protected areas along the Danube River and major tributaries with other critical hotspots for biodiversity.

Taking sturgeons and other migratory fish species (e.g. shads, barbel, nase etc.) as flagship species for all migrants of international relevance in the DRB, MEASURES project wants to identify, map and connect the migratory fish habitats in order to protect and enhance these aquatic ecological corridors.

Three specific objectives in MEASURES project

» Identification & mapping of migratory fish habitats

In order to develop in the end a MEASURES Information System (MIS), we will collect all information on migratory fish and their habitats gained within MEASURES project and already existing information from relevant sources. All these will be useful for developing the strategy for the re-connection of migratory fish habitats and initiating transboundary protection measures along the Danube and its main tributaries.

» Strategy for the re-connection of migratory fish habitats

Development of a harmonized & improved strategy for the re-connection of migratory fish habitats is essential in order to secure and re-establish vital ecological corridors in the DRB. Its role is to enhance capacity at national and transnational level by integrating water management and nature conservation and by strengthening the support for the conservation of migratory fish by improving ecological corridors.

» Conservation of the Danube sturgeon species

Danube is home to some of the most endangered sturgeon populations. Bulgaria and Romania hold the only – still – viable populations of wild sturgeons in the EU. Therefore, we have to provide a strategy to conserve the genetic pool of Danube sturgeon species. One of the main MEASURES project's aim is to restock two native sturgeon species in Hungary and Romania to ensure their presence in the Danube.