

Sturgeon facing extinction due to poaching

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First it was dams, then pollution -- but now the world's most endangered and valuable fish is facing its most threatening problem: human poachers.

Sturgeon eggs -- known as caviar -- are among the most valuable wildlife commodities on Earth, The New York Times reported Monday.

Worth about \$2,500 a pound, poachers operate freely, bribing fishing inspectors and police officials. Some fishermen told the Times they pay \$500 or more a month in bribes.

The Caspian sturgeon are covered by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna, which mandates nations create conservation policies for threatened species. However, observers say though there is abundant political rhetoric, there is little enforcement.

Dr. Ellen Pikitch, co-author of a recent study in the journal *Fish and Fisheries* documenting sturgeon declines worldwide, told the Times: "My hope is that the fish can make it through this time when corruption is rampant in all manner of life. In the meantime we have to ... hope that the fish don't go extinct before these societies mature."

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