

Satellites track Caspian Sea sturgeon

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Scientists working on the Ural River in Kazakhstan are using satellite technology to trace sturgeons into the Caspian Sea.

The project, led by Phaedra Doukakis of the University of Miami's Pew Institute for Ocean Science, is designed to gain information about Caspian Sea sturgeon movement and behavior never before available.

The scientists, including researchers from Kazakhstan and the Wildlife Conservation Society, have tagged three beluga sturgeons and one adult ship sturgeon.

"This study is precedent setting," said Doukakis. "It is the first to use satellite tagging to study Caspian Sea sturgeons. Kazakhstan has taken a giant leap forward with this research and set an example for other Caspian nations to follow. What we learn will be critical for conservation of these highly endangered sturgeons."

Collecting data every minute for a specified period of time and relaying the information to scientists, the researchers say satellite tagging is an increasingly important tool for studying fish biology.

Caspian Sea beluga sturgeons have suffered an estimated 90-percent decline in population during the last two decades. The Ural River is home to the last great population of the beluga and is the only place where beluga sturgeons reproduce naturally.

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