



Caviar: Trading in black gold

As a highly prized luxury food, caviar can cost up to €700 per 100 grams. But you could pay an even heavier price in fines if you buy or import caviar and are unaware of the CITES restrictions.

Declining sturgeon stocks

Caviar is unfertilised eggs (roe) of sturgeon and paddlefish, an ancient group of fish occurring in seas, lakes and rivers of the northern hemisphere. Wild populations of these fish have declined so much that most species are now threatened with extinction; one of the main reasons for this is over-fishing for caviar and meat.

Beluga sturgeon from the Caspian and Black Sea basins produces the most valuable variety of caviar. Caviar from Star, Persian and Russian sturgeon as well as paddlefish caviar are also popular in Europe.

CITES and caviar

All sturgeon and paddlefish species are protected by CITES. Two species are listed in Appendix I and commercial trade is not permitted. Trade in the other species is tightly regulated. Countries that share populations of sturgeons (e.g. countries bordering the Caspian Sea) must agree upon export quotas before trade is permitted.

Large seizures of caviar indicate that illegal trade continues. To help prevent illegal trade, all caviar containers in trade must have a CITES label.

When buying caviar, make sure the container has a CITES label. Up to 125 g of caviar can be imported into the EU for personal consumption without a permit. Larger quantities require CITES permits.