



Short Note

A Recent Record of Sturgeon (*Acipenser* sp.) in the Maritsa River near Plovdiv, Southern Bulgaria, with Reference to Historical Data

Kristiyan B. Vladov *

Regional Natural History Museum – Plovdiv, 34 Hristo G. Danov Str., Plovdiv 4000, Bulgaria

*E-mail: vladovkristiyan@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0009-0009-2444-1074>

Abstract. In 2022, a single specimen belonging to the genus *Acipenser* was recorded in a suburban section of the Maritsa River near Plovdiv, Southern Bulgaria. The fish was captured during recreational spinning angling, photographed, and released alive. Reliable identification to species level was not possible. The record provides new data on the contemporary ichthyofauna of the Maritsa River.

Keywords: fish, ichthyofauna, Maritsa River, Plovdiv, sturgeon

Introduction

Over the years, the species composition of the fish fauna of the Maritsa River and its tributaries has been documented by various authors. The earliest data were provided by Heckel (1837), who reported 17 fish species from five families. In the early 20th century, Kovatcheff (1921) recorded 25 species from 11 families, while Chichkoff (1935) noted 26 species from nine families, including the presence of *Acipenser sturio* (Linnaeus, 1758). Records of sturgeon occurrence in the Maritsa River are found only in a limited number of early publications (Kovatcheff, 1921; Morov, 1931; Zashev, 1961).

In the mid-20th century, Mihaylova (1965) documented 18 species from eight families and reported a significant decline in the ichthyofauna compared to the

1930s, with sturgeons no longer being recorded. Subsequent studies conducted in the Plovdiv region and along the Maritsa River during the late 20th and early 21st centuries also failed to record representatives of the genus *Acipenser* (Velcheva & Mehterov, 2005; Kolev, 2013; Gecheva *et al.*, 2011; Georgiev *et al.*, 2015; Mollov & Georgiev, 2015; Petrov & Mollov, 2022; Georgiev, 2022).

The present note complements the most recent published data (Georgiev, 2022) by reporting a new occurrence of sturgeon in a suburban section of the Maritsa River near Plovdiv (Fig. 1.), contributing to the current understanding of the river's ichthyofauna (Fig. 2.).

Material and Methods

The present note is based on field observations and an analysis of published

data. Field observations were carried out in a suburban section of the Maritsa River near Plovdiv, Southern Bulgaria, during the period 2022–2024.

Field data originate from opportunistic capture during recreational fishing with a rod. The recorded specimen of the genus *Acipenser* was caught in 2022 using spinning fishing with an artificial lure. The study is non-

systematic in nature and was not aimed at quantitative assessment of the fish fauna.

The specimen was identified in situ based on external morphological characters. No ichthyological material was fixed or preserved, and no specimens were deposited in collections. The fish was photographed and released alive immediately after capture.



Fig. 1. Sturgeon specimen caught in the suburban zone of the Maritsa River near Plovdiv, Bulgaria, during fieldwork in 2022. Photo: Personal archive.

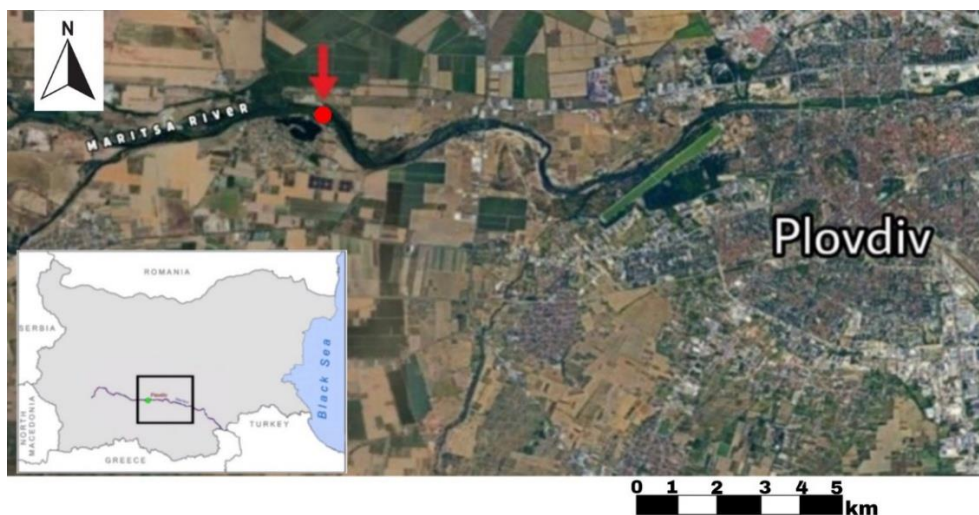


Fig. 2. Exact location of the sturgeon capture along the Maritsa River, marked with a red arrow. The site is situated in the *Benta* locality near the 9th kilometer, west of the city of Plovdiv, Southern Bulgaria.

Species identification was performed using standard ichthyological identification keys (Karapetkova & Zivkov, 1995; Kottelat & Freyhof, 2007). Due to the lack of detailed morphometric data and genetic material, the specimen could not be reliably identified to species level and is therefore referred to as *Acipenser* sp.

Results and Discussion

During the period 2022–2024, the capture of a single specimen belonging to the genus *Acipenser* was documented in a suburban section of the Maritsa River near Plovdiv. The specimen was caught in 2022 during recreational spinning angling. The fish was photographed and released alive, and due to the lack of detailed morphometric and genetic data, reliable identification to species level was not possible. Historical records indicate that sturgeons were present in the river basin in the past, but they have been considered absent since the mid-20th century. In this context, possible explanations for the origin of the recorded specimen include long-distance natural movement within the river system or anthropogenic introduction, for example through escape from aquaculture facilities (Koutrakis & Economidis, 2006; Koutrakis *et al.*, 2011).

References

Berg, L. S. 1948. *Freshwater Fishes of USSR and Adjacent Countries* (Vol. I). IPST, Jerusalem (English translation, 1962).

Chichkoff, G. 1935. Sur un barbeau peu connu. *Annuaire de l'Université de Sofia, Faculté Physico-mathématique*, Tome XXXI, Livre 3 (Sciences Naturelles), 1934/1935.

Gecheva, G., Yurukova, L., Ganeva, A. 2011. Assessment of pollution with aquatic bryophytes in Maritsa River (Bulgaria). *Bulletin of*

Environmental Contamination and Toxicology, 87(4): 480-485.

Georgiev, D. 2022. The fish species (Pisces) in the city of Plovdiv – A review. *Bulletin of the Natural History Museum – Plovdiv*, Supplement 2: 1-2.

Georgiev, D., Petrova, S., Gecheva, G., Velcheva, I., Tsekov, A., Yancheva, V., Mollov, I. 2015. Freshwater habitats in Plovdiv town and its surroundings and their importance for the biodiversity. *Journal of BioScience & Biotechnology*, 4 (2).

Heckel, J. 1837. *Ichthyologische Beiträge zu den Familien der Cottoiden, Scorpaeniden, Gobioiden und Cyprinoiden*, 155 p.

Karapetkova, M., Zivkov, M. 1995. *Fishes of Bulgaria*. Gea-Libris Publ., Sofia, 247 p. (in Bulgarian).

Kolev, V. 2013. Species composition of the ichthyofauna of some tributaries of the Maritza River. *Forestry Ideas*, 19(2): 129-139.

Kottelat, M., Freyhof, J. 2007. *Handbook of European freshwater fishes* (Vol. 13). Publications Kottelat, Cornol, Switzerland.

Koutrakis, E. T., Economidis, P. S. 2006. Did sturgeons return to River Evros? *Alieftika Nea*, 306: 68-83 (in Greek).

Koutrakis, E., Sapounidis, A., Favre-Krey, L., Krey, G., Economidis, P. S. 2011. Incidental catches of Acipenseridae in the estuary of the River Evros, Greece. *Journal of Applied Ichthyology*, 27(2): 366-368.

Kovatcheff, V. 1921. Attempt to study the ichthyofauna of the Maritza and its tributaries. *Proceedings of the Bulgarian Naturalist Society*, 9: 90-94 (in Bulgarian).

Mihaylova, L. 1965. On the ichthyofauna of Thrace. In: *Thrace Fauna*, Part II. Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Zoological Institute and Museum, pp. 265-289.

- Mollov, I., Georgiev, D. 2015. Plovdiv. In: Kelcey, J. G. (Ed.), *Vertebrates and Invertebrates of European Cities: Selected Non-Avian Fauna*. Springer, 700 pp.
- Morov, T. 1931. Freshwater fishes in Bulgaria. Bulgarian Fishermen's Union. "Artist", 39-40 (in Bulgarian).
- Petrov, A., Mollov, I. 2022. Species composition and distribution of the vertebrates at Maritsa River in the city of Plovdiv. *Bulletin of the Natural History Museum – Plovdiv*, Supplement 2: 41-57.
- Velcheva, I., Mehterov, N. 2005. A study on the ichthyocenosis diversity in the downstream of the Maritza River. *Scientific Studies – Biology*, Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv, 41: 69-78.
- Zashev, D. 1961. *Ichthyology*. State Publishing House "Science and Art", Sofia, 283 p. (in Bulgarian).

Received: 10.11.2025

Accepted: 22.12.2025

Published: 23.12.2025