

FACT SHEET

Black gold: The caviar trade in western Europe

Overview of legal international caviar trade 1998-2006

The world's largest caviar importers (tonnes=t):

All EU Member States	619 t
(Germany)	233 t
(France)	231 t
USA	292 t
Switzerland	149 t
Japan	132 t

The world's largest caviar exporters:

Iran	438 t
Russian Federation	138 t
Kazakhstan	95 t
Azerbaijan	35 t
China	29 t
Romania	26 t

Legal international trade between 1998 and 2006: 1313 t

Source: CITES trade data for the years 1998 to 2006

Caviar, the renowned gourmet delicacy, is the unfertilized roe of sturgeon and paddlefish (*Acipenseriformes*), a very ancient group of fish that occur in coastal and inland waters of 25 countries in Europe, Asia and North America.

There are 27 species of sturgeon and paddlefish, among them the Beluga *Huso huso*, which can reach an age of 100 years and can weigh more than two tonnes. It produces the most valuable caviar, the sought-after beluga. Other traditional varieties of caviar include osietra, which comes from the Russian Sturgeon *Acipenser gueldenstaedtii* and the Persian Sturgeon *Acipenser persicus*, and sevruga, which comes from the Stellate Sturgeon *Acipenser stellatus*. Caviar is one of the most expensive wildlife products, fetching retail prices of up to EUR600 per 100 g in “delicatessens” in western Europe and the USA.

Sturgeons of the Caspian Sea produce what is claimed to be the highest quality caviar and the countries bordering the Caspian Sea have been the source of the majority of the caviar in global trade in recent years. Other important sources are the Amur and the Danube river basins, the Black Sea, the Sea of Azov and the Great Lakes of North America.

Many sturgeon stocks are seriously depleted as a result of illegal fishing of sturgeons and habitat degradation. In response to reported declines in sturgeon populations and with the aim of ensuring that trade in sturgeon products, such as caviar, is sustainable and not threatening the species' survival, all species of sturgeon and paddlefish have been listed in the Appendices of CITES (The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) since 1998. All caviar in international trade (exports, imports and re-exports) must be accompanied by CITES documents. These can only be issued by specific government authorities once certain requirements have been met.

The European Union is the largest importer of caviar

According to trade statistics reported by countries to CITES, the European Union (EU), the USA and Switzerland are the largest importers of caviar, importing 81% of all caviar reported in legal international trade between 1998 and 2006 (see **text box** on left). During that period, the volumes of caviar reported in international trade per year plummeted from a peak at 263 tonnes (t) in 1999 to 44 t in 2006. Among the 27 EU Member States, France and Germany are the largest importers. Besides their role as consumers, the EU and Switzerland are also important 'transit' points for caviar, which re-export to other countries over 50% of the caviar they import. Besides the caviar reported in international trade, considerable volumes of caviar are also consumed domestically in the countries of origin, for example in the Russian Federation and the USA. The majority of the caviar imported by the EU and Switzerland comes from Iran and the Russian Federation, the two 'giants' among the world's caviar producers. Other important exporters of caviar are Kazakhstan, China and Azerbaijan.



Caviar seized in the EU from 2000 to 2007:

2000	4325 kg
2001	981 kg
2002	305 kg
2003	1373 kg
2004	101 kg
2005	236 kg
2006	79 kg
2007	48 kg
Total	7448 kg

Source: EU-TWIX and data collected by TRAFFIC, 2008; data are not complete and do not include seizures from all countries.

TRAFFIC, the wildlife trade monitoring network, works to ensure that trade in wild plants and animals is not a threat to the conservation of nature.

For further information about TRAFFIC visit www.traffic.org.

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Over the past decade, quantities of legal caviar in international trade decreased for a number of reasons, mainly as a result of overfishing and poaching and—very probably—an increase in the illegal trade in caviar.

Illegal trade in caviar is thriving

It is difficult to quantify the levels of illegal caviar trade, as this is by nature a hidden activity. What is known is often anecdotal and based on reported seizures and convictions. However, large seizures of illegal caviar in Europe indicate that there is a thriving black market in the luxury roe, which is threatening the survival of sturgeon species. They also demonstrate that caviar smugglers are well-organized and use sophisticated methods and the illegal caviar trade is considered to have strong links with organized crime groups.

EU-TWIX, an online database, accessed exclusively by officials from the 27 EU Member States, helps law enforcers in the EU to fight wildlife trade crime. According to data reported to EU-TWIX to date, over 7 t of illegal caviar were seized by European authorities from 2000 to 2007 (see **text box** on left). However, the real size of the illegal trade is likely to be considerably higher, given that much of it is undetected and information is incomplete for some importing countries. The illicit caviar trade is particularly difficult to control in the EU single market, where caviar that has been imported by one Member State can be moved freely between the 27 countries. Co-operation and information exchange is therefore of particular importance, not only between EU Member States, but also with neighbouring and exporting countries.

An investigation by German Customs officials in 2005 illustrated not only the size of the illicit trade but also the importance of international co-operation. The investigation revealed that two businessmen smuggled at least 1.4 t of caviar into the EU and sold it illegally in various EU Member States using falsified documents. German Customs discovered the case after they were tipped off by French Customs officials.

Caviar labelling will help to stem illegal trade

In order to assist law enforcers and consumers in distinguishing legal caviar in trade from illegal caviar, CITES Parties agreed on a standardized labelling system for all caviar containers in domestic and international trade. This labelling system, which has been established to regulate the legal caviar trade around the world, will allow law enforcers to track the origin of caviar and identify whether it is legal or not.

In May 2006, the EU adopted *Commission Regulation (EC) No. 865/2006*, amended by *Regulation (EC) No. 100/2008*, that has made the labelling of all caviar containers obligatory in all EU Member States. It is therefore essential that everyone involved in the caviar trade, including importers, exporters, wholesalers and retailers, as well as consumers, are aware of these new labelling requirements so that they can make sure the caviar they are selling or buying is labelled according to CITES requirements.