

Securing Sturgeon: Politics of Life and Death in the pursuit of 'Black Gold'

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Sturgeon are the most critically endangered group of species on the planet. Despite the fact that species of sturgeon are precipitously close to extinction, the fish have hardly captured the attention of the conservation world or been subject to the same 'militarized conservation' strategies that increasingly characterise attempts to secure the lives of charismatic species such as rhino and elephants. This paper argues that unlike the securitized conservation practices directed at numerous high-value species, the conservation of sturgeon remains largely unsecuritized. On the other hand, the commodification of sturgeon as 'lively capital' circulating in the global economy, has resulted in sturgeon lives being rendered as referent objects of security. I make the case that processes of securitization designed to ensure the longevity of sturgeon for purposes of capitalist accumulation have resulted in ostensibly 'securitized caviar economies.' As global bans on wild sturgeon fishing have been applied and extended, the caviar industry has been forced to respond by exclusively farming sturgeon to meet global caviar demand. The paper examines the impact of this shift in production methods from a biopolitical lens, seeking to interrogate the complex human–nonhuman relations that characterize 'securitized caviar economies.' In particular the paper dwells on the politics of life and death: of human interventions designed to 'make live' and 'let die.' The paper argues that sturgeon lives are not secured indefinitely, but that their deaths are precisely governed in order to extract caviar from their bodies and whet the appetites of humans seeking to consume 'Black Gold.'