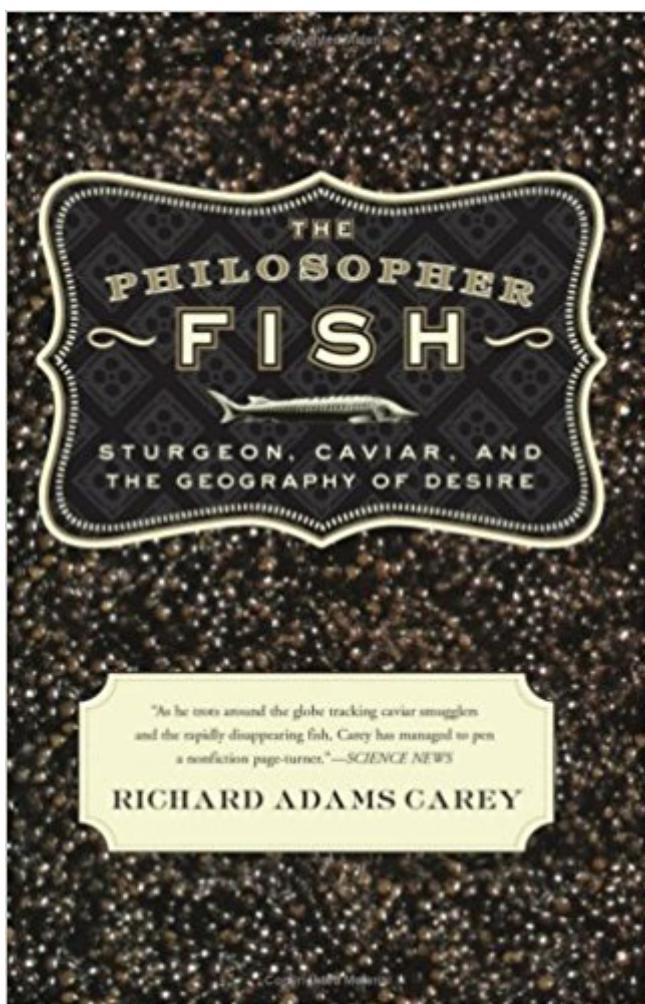


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# The Philosopher Fish: Sturgeon, Caviar, And The Geography Of Desire



## Synopsis

Since the days of the Persian empire, caviar has trumpeted status, wealth, prestige, and sex appeal. Today it goes for up to one hundred dollars an ounce, and aficionados will go to extraordinary lengths to get their fill of it. According to acclaimed writer Richard Adams Carey, that's just the problem. In this spectacular jaunt, Carey immerses himself in the world of sturgeon, the fish that lays these golden eggs. What he finds is disturbing. Sturgeon population worldwide have declined 70 percent in the last twenty years, most drastically in the Caspian Sea. The beluga sturgeon, producer of the most coveted caviar, has climbed to number four on the World Wildlife Fund's most-endangered species list. Armed with a novelist's eye for human eccentricity and an investigator's nose for trouble Carey takes us on an illuminating journey across the globe to uncover, the secrets of the sturgeon. On that trek we meet the fascinating real-life characters both profiting from its scarcity and fighting to save it. A high-stakes cocktail of business, diplomacy, technology, and espionage, *The Philosopher Fish* is, at its heart, the epic story of a 250-million year-old fish struggling to survive.

## Book Information

Paperback: 352 pages

Publisher: Counterpoint; 1 edition (February 14, 2006)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1582433526

ISBN-13: 978-1582433523

Product Dimensions: 4.9 x 0.9 x 7.4 inches

Shipping Weight: 12.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars 9 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #2,339,455 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #70 in Books > Science & Math > Nature & Ecology > Field Guides > Fish #425 in Books > Science & Math > Nature & Ecology > Natural Resources > Fisheries & Aquaculture #887 in Books > Science & Math > Biological Sciences > Biology > Marine Biology

## Customer Reviews

With the humanism and narrative mastery that won him acclaim for *Against the Tide*, ecojournalist Carey weaves the story of an enigmatic fish and the "multitude of hooks" in the "gilded morsel." Geneticists believe the sturgeon holds the key to understanding the secrets of vertebrate evolution; canny entrepreneurs, meanwhile, pursue it for the high prices it fetches. Navigating the eddies of

avarice and ecological altruism, Carey baits with hard data, arresting first-person writing and well-wrought insights. This is the sort of nonfiction that, by virtue of the author's generalist assurance, can satisfy a broad readership. Students of global political economy, for example, will find plenty to admire in a book whose subject, viewed as a commodity, echoes--and is imperiled by--that of oil, the Caspian region's other black gold. Those with stateside interests--e.g., American natural history and environmentalism--will also find the work fascinating, as few creatures could better illuminate the rift between the utilitarian and the preservationist factions of the American environmental movement. The interconnected stories Carey shares converge in a deeper understanding of the human species, one whose desires are embodied as much by the gun-toting buccaneers of the Caspian coast as by the rain-slickered and lab-coated ranks of the world's sturgeon hatcheries. Agent, Gary Morris of the David Black Literary Agency. (Mar.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Richard Adams Carey was born in Connecticut and educated at Harvard College. After his graduation he went to work in a northwestern sawmill, and he has since divided his time between Alaska and New England. Carey lives with his family in North Sandwich, New Hampshire, and works at the Holderness School.

The thrilling, elegantly written crime-story, travelogue, history and adventures of a 250-million year old fish that has 4, 8 or 16 chromosomes. Yes, of course it is about caviar as well, as the inventor of the word "ecology" and founder of the Sierra Club himself John Muir said, way back in the 1800s, "you follow the money" and the money, in caviars case, leads to the death and extinction of one of the world's greatest fish, the sturgeon. The attempts to save the endangered species of the world, from man's grasping greed, are nearly all sad stories with very unhappy endings. The importance of the sturgeon is not in the "black gold" of caviar alone, not the jaded palates of our Gatsby's, but in its links to our own evolution and understanding. Carey undertook research in the sturgeons waters from Florida's Suwannee River - where my wife had the privilege of seeing a sturgeon leap like a mackerel - to the weirdness and corruption of Turkmenistan. This book has been built upon very much boots-on-the ground research, which yielded facts, characters and experiences that made the author weep. It is only a story about a fish ... and a scaly monstrous, dragon-like beast at that ... but the pathos of this animal's slaughter - still only rated as "Threatened" despite its poaching and poisoning - is truly heart rending. Will we continue to choose oil and dams, Their attendant pollution,

theft and corruption, which cater to mankind's need for instant gratification, or do we, somehow, somewhere, find resources for these endangered species which are "for ever" as peoples as diverse as Native Americans and Caspian Sea fisherman plead? A very powerful, well written book that will give any reader food for thought, particularly if they love caviar!

A well written very interesting book on a very interesting subject

The Philosopher Fish is a well-written and entertaining look at sturgeon, sturgeon conservation and caviar. Gets a little too much into legal battles across borders and illegal caviar traffic, but still worth a read. I would give it 5 stars if it focused on the fish a little more.

In *THE PHILOSOPHER FISH*, Richard Adams Carey has written an epic chronicle of the sturgeon--a fish species rapidly approaching extinction wherever it swims--as well as of its precious product, caviar. Selling for as much as one hundred dollars an ounce, caviar has become an icon of status and success, and as such, it has led to the inevitable decline of that curious and prehistoric fish: the sturgeon. Carey exams both the fish as a species as well as the industry that seeks to exploit it. The fascinating and ancient phylogeny of the sturgeon notwithstanding, this fish is clearly in trouble. In the last two decades, sturgeon populations have shrunk to less than one third of what they were. Much of U.S. trade in caviar, as elsewhere, is illegal, but up until now, those who are working to save the sturgeon are largely ineffective. As in the drug trade, the potential rewards to be reaped by the caviar industry have led to energetic smuggling operations, the mislabeling of sturgeon species on caviar tins, as well as other shenanigans. Among the many storylines covered in *THE PHILOSOPHER FISH*, Carey follows the efforts of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to stymie the illegal trade in caviar, though as a result of 9/11, their resources have largely been diverted elsewhere. Carey also follows several of the sturgeons' champions in this world as they seek to improve the fish's plight. There is some slight hope in the efforts of those that hatchery-spawn sturgeon species for aquacultural purposes and possibly for future restocking projects. In his search for every sturgeon-related experience he could find, Carey even ice-fishes for sturgeon in Lake Winnebago, one of the few places in the world where this can be done (strict quotas make the season as short as only 2 days a year), but he clearly feels conflicted about it (he didn't catch anything). He drinks vodka along the shores of the Volga River as he observes the trade, both legal and illegal, of the world's most famous caviar locales. *THE PHILOSOPHER FISH* takes the reader around the world, from Sacramento to the shores of the Caspian Sea. Many of the

stories involve intrigue and espionage of the highest order. Others are humorous or bitter-sweet. Still others offer hope. All are intensely interesting. I enjoy reading books that tell me more than I ever wanted to know about one circumscribed subject. THE PHILOSOPHER FISH is such a book, and I give it my highest recommendation.Jeremy W. Forstadt

The sturgeon has been associated with the luxury food caviar since the days of the Persian Empire, with both wealth and sex appeal associated to its ingestion over the centuries - but today it's a fast-vanishing fish, threatening to take with it the people who depend on it for a living. Sturgeon natural history is examined by Carey, who journeys around the world to uncover its habits, habitat, and those profiting from it. Anticipate more than a natural history alone though: international politics, economics, and world diplomacy are all deftly examined with the sturgeon at the heart of all issues.

Mr. Carey paints an interesting and informative portrait of the rich, sordid world of caviar production and of the sturgeon itself. You don't have to be a lover of caviar to enjoy this book, but if you are it makes you more appreciative of the noble egg. I recommend the book highly and suggest Robbing the Bees as an additional title to check into if you like this one!

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