

DANUBE ROACH (*Rutilus virgo*, Heckel, 1852)

Black Sea Basin

Native species

E – Endangered species

The Danube roach grows 20 to 35 cm, reaching a maximum of 50 cm. It has a moderately deep, laterally compressed body covered with large scales. The lateral line is complete, containing up to 55 scales. The head is small and the mouth is terminal, slightly subinferior with thick lips. All fins have soft rays. The anal and pelvic fins are orange-red, while the pectoral fins are pale yellow.

It inhabits the main currents of medium-sized rivers, staying in strong flows below weirs and river thresholds.

Males reach sexual maturity at 3 to 4 years, and females at 4 to 5 years. Spawning occurs from March to May in small schools. The female lays 35,000 to 60,000 eggs on aquatic vegetation or on gravel bottoms. During the spawning season, it migrates into tributaries and river branches, where it seeks dense aquatic vegetation or gravel beds—it is a potamodromous migratory species. During spawning, males develop large nuptial tubercles on the sides and head, arranged in a crown-like pattern on the head—hence the scientific name *virgo*, meaning virgin.

It feeds mainly on aquatic plants, occasionally on aquatic invertebrates. It is endemic to the Danube basin, inhabiting the Danube River and its lower tributaries, from Bavaria downstream to Romania. In Slovenia, it lives in all watercourses of the Danube basin, with the largest populations in the Ljubljana river basin, the lower Sava river, and in the Mirna, Krka, and Kolpa rivers.

The main threats to the species are gravel extraction, which destroys spawning grounds, and dams, which block migration routes to smaller tributaries for spawning. The most critical threat is the insufficient legal catch size (35 cm) as at that length most females are not yet sexually mature.

It is protected by fishing size limits, closed seasons and catch restrictions. Effective conservation measures include proper river regulation, reduction of water pollution and protection of natural habitats.

Danube roach – *Rutilus virgo* (Heckel, 1852)

River basins in Slovenia: Danube

Spawning season: March to May

Number of eggs: 35,000 to 60,000

Sexual maturity: 3 to 4 years (male), 4 to 5 years (female)

Size: 20 to 35 cm (max. 50 cm)

Red List of Slovenia: E – Endangered

Species status: Native

Migration mode: Medium-distance migrations (Potamodromous)

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