



Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species

What is the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)?

In the early 1960s, international discussion began focusing on the rate at which the world's wild animals and plants were being threatened by unregulated international trade.

CITES entered into force in 1975, and became the only global treaty that ensures that international wildlife trade is based on sustainable use and management of wild and captive populations. It provides a framework for cooperation and collaboration among nations to prevent further decline in wild populations of animals and plants.

More than 160 countries, including the United States, implement CITES, with new countries joining each year.

Who is involved?

A Secretariat, located in Geneva, Switzerland, administers the treaty. Permanent committees (Standing, Animals, Plants, and Nomenclature Committees) provide technical and scientific support to member countries (called Parties). Each Party designates Management and Scientific Authorities to process permits, make legal and scientific findings, and monitor trade.

The Conference of the Parties (COP) meets approximately every two years to review CITES implementation and assess the status of species in trade. Through the adoption of resolutions and species proposals, the COP develops practical solutions to complex wildlife trade problems.

Non-governmental organizations, representing conservation, animal welfare, trade, zoological, botanical, and scientific interests, participate as non-voting observers at COPs and Animals and Plants Committee meetings.

How are species listed?

Cacti, iguanas, and parrots represent some of the approximately 30,000 species protected by CITES, which are listed in three appendices.

- Appendix I includes species threatened with extinction and allows no commercial trade in these species. Examples include gorillas, sea turtles, most lady slipper orchids, and giant pandas.
- Appendix II includes species that, although currently not threatened with extinction, may become so without trade controls. It includes species that resemble other listed species and could be misidentified. Most CITES species are listed in this appendix, including American ginseng, paddlefish, and many corals.
- Appendix III includes species that a range country has asked for cooperation from other parties to help them better control international trade in native species. Examples include the walrus and Cape stag beetle.

How does CITES monitor trade?

The backbone of CITES is the permit system that facilitates international cooperation in conservation and trade monitoring. Permits are issued only if a country's Management and Scientific Authorities determine that trade is legal and does not threaten the species' survival in the wild.

The use of standardized permit forms allows inspection officials at ports of export and import to quickly verify that CITES specimens are properly documented. They also facilitate the collection of species-specific trade data, which are used in the creation of annual reports. These data are used to determine trends in trade and to ensure that significant trade in wildlife is sustainable.



“Recognizing, in addition, that international cooperation is essential for the protection of certain species of wild fauna and flora against over-exploitation through international trade.”

CITES Preamble

This monitoring of trade has created a substantial body of information on the management and use of CITES species worldwide.

What has CITES achieved and where is it going?

Over the last couple of decades, CITES has helped ensure global conservation of species. As advancing technology makes it possible to ship wildlife anywhere in the world and as issues of wildlife use grow ever more complex, CITES provides tools to effectively conserve the world's diverse natural resources.

Increased commitment by Parties to treaty implementation has helped control global over-exploitation of wildlife and improved legislation at the national level to enforce CITES. Increased regional communication among Parties also has improved conservation of wildlife across political borders.

The Parties have adopted a 5-year strategic plan to guide CITES. The plan sets the following goals:

- Enhance the ability of each Party to implement the Convention.
- Strengthen the scientific basis of the decision-making processes.
- Contribute to the reduction and ultimate elimination of illegal trade in wild animals and plants.

- Increase cooperation and conclude strategic alliances with international stakeholders.
- Promote a greater understanding of the Convention.
- Progress toward full global membership.
- Provide the Convention with an improved and secure financial and administrative basis.

What can I do to help?

CITES, like most laws and treaties, needs the cooperation and support of the public. Everyone, from individuals to businesses, has a role to play in making the treaty effective by:

- Becoming aware of what wildlife and wildlife products are protected, and obtaining required permits.
- Sharing biological and trade data on species.
- Ensuring that trade practices are based on principles of sustainability.
- Educating others on the importance of conserving the animals and plants that comprise the diverse life of this planet.

Front Top to Bottom:

Lion/© Corel Corporation

Parrots/USFWS

Sea turtle/© Corel Corporation

Pitcher plant/© CITES

Left:

COP meeting/USFWS

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