



Monitoring Illegal Killing of Elephants



WILDLIFE TRADE

CITES Urges Concerted Efforts to Combat Illicit Wildlife Trade

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TEXT & PHOTOS BY LUCY VIGNE

Initially signed by 80 countries in Washington DC, United States, on 3rd March 1973, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) entered into force on 1st July 1975 as an international legally binding agreement that aims to ensure that international trade in wild animals and plants is legal, sustainable and traceable, and does not threaten the survival of the species in the wild. Today, almost all countries in the world are Parties to the Convention.

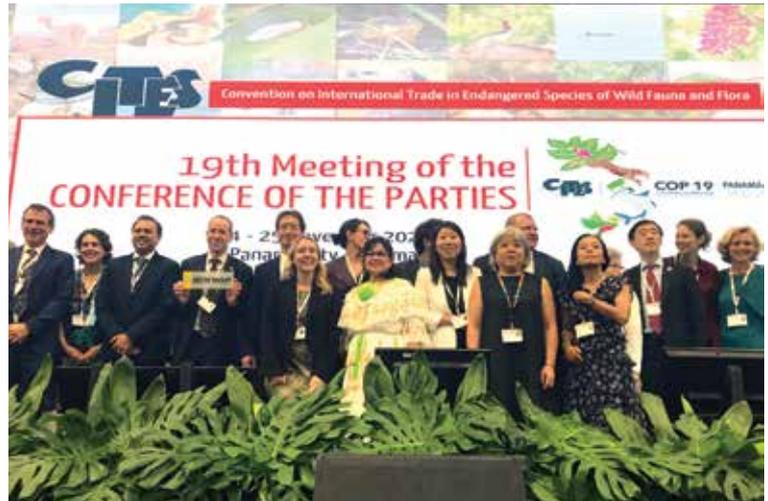
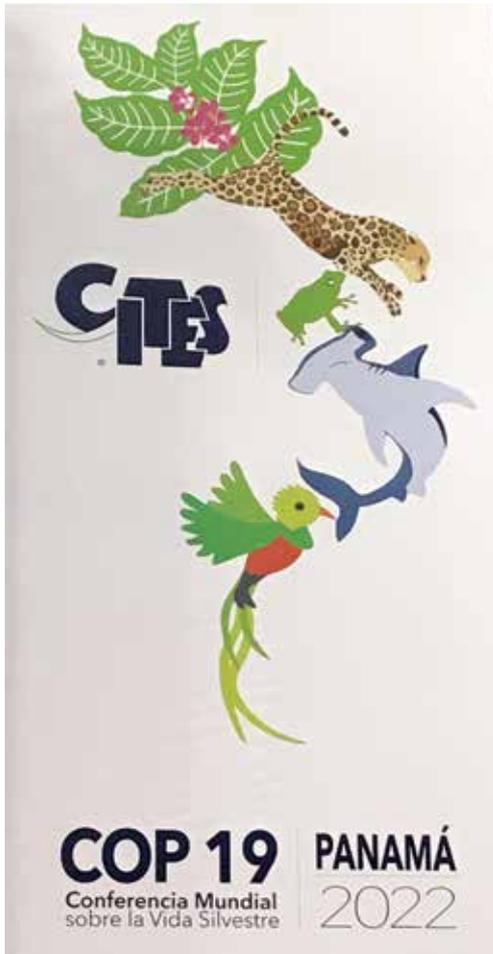
Delegates of the Parties to the Convention meet usually every three years at a two-week

event called the Conference of the Parties (CoP) with 184 Parties deciding on proposals giving varying degrees of protection involving more than 36,000 species in international trade (roughly 30,000 flora and 6,000 fauna species) under three appendices. Appendix I is for a complete international trade ban. Appendix II can allow trade in a species with strict regulations, and Appendix III is for species that are protected at the national level needing Parties to control the trade.

CITES Parties are required to take appropriate measures to enforce the Convention, accepting CITES support and capacity building where needed, and to penalize trade in violation of the Convention. Illegal trade continues to undermine conservation efforts, especially high-value

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MIKE was established by CITES in 1997 as the most reliable measure of elephant poaching, detecting changes and causes of elephant killing. There are currently 69 sites across Africa and 30 sites across Asia.



items targeted by transnational organised crime groups.

This was a focus at CoP19 in Panama City, Panama, from 14-25 November 2022 which attracted more than 2,500 participants, mainly delegates, observers from non-government and inter-government organisations, local community representatives and journalists. Since the previous CITES CoP18 in 2019, focus has heightened on the need to tackle the world's biodiversity crisis, fear of the spread of zoonotic diseases, habitat degradation, climate change, wildlife conflict, and the custodianship of rural people to protect wildlife. These concerns are in keeping with the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals.

In her opening remarks at CoP19, CITES Secretary-General, Ivonne Higuero, whose country was hosting CoP19, said that with CITES on the cusp of its 50th anniversary it is a time for reflection on past and future goals of CITES regarding the sustainability of wildlife in trade. It is indeed time to bring together Parties to fight wildlife trafficking and find ways to ensure the future of so many unique species.

More than 100 so-called working documents were debated, concerning terminology, updates, improvements and clarity in trade matters. Some were resolved, but many need further discussion.

Delegates adopted 46 of 52 proposals on mammals, certain traded bird species, reptiles (mostly lizard species), amphibians (mainly frog species), and fish (including shark species, sea cucumbers and ornamental fishes), and of course flora, especially tropical timber. Most proposals required increased controls, as we are yet to see a turnabout for most species regarding conservation successes.

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Panama generously hosted CITES CoP19.

TOP RIGHT
The CITES Secretariat gathered on the stage at the end of CoP19.

BELOW RIGHT
Panama's rich tropical rainforests and cloud forests are home to numerous colourful frog species.



TOP LEFT
Young Panamanian school children gathered outside the Convention Centre at the start of CITES CoP19 holding placards of endangered animals saying 'Nature not Money'.

BELOW LEFT
Meha Kumar of Save the Elephants, based in Nairobi, provided at CITES CoP19 their new manuals to help turn human elephant conflict into coexistence.



Kenya presented a working document, which was not accepted, to establish a compensatory fund for elephant range States, proportionate to elephant numbers and for non-commercial disposal of ivory stockpiles. Kenya stated it intends to examine innovative sustainable funding options to support conservation and to take this idea forward, outside CITES first.

We will now look at the first five Appendix proposals presented to CoP19. These involved the megafauna pachyderms of Africa -- hippos, rhinos and elephants.

Proposal 1, presented by Benin, with 10 other western and central African nations, was to transfer the hippo from Appendix II to I for Africa. Although this species faces significant threats in West Africa, mainly due to habitat loss, water pollution and illegal killing (often in retaliation), according to the IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC) Hippo Specialist Group, their numbers remain high

in much of southern Africa. Poaching for the international trafficking in hippo teeth and tusks was not considered a significant threat to the species. The Parties, therefore, decided by consensus that the species does not meet the biological or CITES criteria for Appendix I. Near the end of the meeting, Benin instead proposed to retain the hippo on Appendix II with a zero-export quota. It was agreed that improved conservation measures are needed but that such trade restrictions could have negative consequences for the conservation of the species in areas where there are large hippo populations affecting rural people. The proposal was therefore rejected.

Proposal 2 from Namibia and Botswana was to transfer the population of Namibia's southern white rhinos from Appendix I to II with an annotation to allow international trade only for live animals for in-situ conservation, and to continue to allow hunting trophies (as allowed for South Africa and Eswatini). They withdrew the annotation to allow hunting trophies as they do that anyway under a different ruling. With annual poaching in Namibia less than one per cent of the population, which has grown to second in size after South Africa, the CoP agreed by consensus to the proposal. Decisions come into force 90 days after the CoP ends, when Namibia can allow the sale of White Rhinos to African countries within the species' natural and historical range to help expand and increase their numbers in the wild.

Proposal 3 from Eswatini (formerly Swaziland) was to allow international trade in rhino horn from the country's Appendix II small southern white rhino population. This is the third CoP where Eswatini has made such a proposal, stating that, since the COVID-19 pandemic, there are now far greater economic hardships impacting the protection of rhinos. The CoP did not support the proposal due to continued uncertainty about potential market impacts and how the proposed trade would be carried out with restrictions on legal trade in consumer markets.

Proposal 4 from Zimbabwe regarding savannah elephants in Botswana, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe, was to amend the annotation of the Appendix II listing (meaning to make a change) to allow exports of registered raw ivory. But without detailing safeguards and precautionary measures, it was rejected by the Parties. Near the end of the conference, Zimbabwe instead proposed trade only in leather goods for commercial and non-commercial purposes, but this was also rejected by the Parties.

Proposal 5 presented by Burkina Faso, with Equatorial Guinea, Mali and Senegal, was to

CONSERVATION



transfer the elephants of Botswana, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe from Appendix II to 1, as for other range States. Most Parties acknowledged that these countries' elephant populations do not meet the biological criteria for Appendix I as they do not have small populations, nor restricted range, nor are they in marked decline. Rather than punishing these countries, the debate concluded that their conservation success should be recognized. The proposal was not accepted.

During lunch breaks and evenings, the main NGOs hosted side events, with food and drinks provided, for participants to gather and exchange views, and learn more about topical subjects, such as wildlife crime, species status and threats, as well as indigenous people and local community (IPLC) livelihoods. There were presentations also on ways to combat increasing human-wildlife conflict, reducing demand for illegal wildlife trade, CITES electronic permits, unregulated exotic pet trade, illegal online trading, and how to implement CITES improvements.

There was an excellent turn out of Kenyans involved in side events, including the Conservation Alliance of Kenya with their presentation entitled 'Connectivity and Coexistence' describing Kenya's conservancy areas, with presenters including the governors of Kajiado and Narok counties, Joseph ole Lenku and Patrick ole Ntutu.

Members of the IUCN SSC (Species Survival Commission) African Rhino Specialist Group gave presentations with the IUCN SSC Asian Rhino Specialist Group and others on the future of rhinos, which encouraged much



needed dialogue amongst stakeholders.

The IUCN SSC African Elephant Specialist Group partook in four side events: 1) The status of African forest elephants. 2) The *Human-Elephant Coexistence Toolbox* manual showcased by Save The Elephants. 3) An update on the African Elephant Database, with the IUCN SSC Asian Elephant Specialist Group. 4) Combating transnational crime through DNA forensics.

Overall, there was a realization at CITES CoP19 that countries must work together to meet their common goals, enabling wildlife to flourish in the wild. Elephants and rhinos remain at the forefront of international concern. There was much open discussion and this must continue as CITES Parties grapple with possible solutions to improve law enforcement and trade regulations, and for success in future conservation. ●

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The green iguana is a tree-living reptile that is becoming rare over much of its former range due to continuing destruction of tropical forests.

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Kenya was well represented at the CITES Conference.

BELOW RIGHT

At the IUCN African Elephant Specialist Group's side event on the status of the forest elephant species, scientists explained the DNA-based distributions of forest, savannah and hybrid African elephants, sharing important information to many.



LUCY VIGNE has been studying the trade in ivory and rhino horn world-wide since the mid-1980s.