IUCN World Conservation Congress, Reverse the Red Pavilion

Keynote Presentation

Sustainable use: a powerful tool to ensure the conservation of species of wild fauna and flora

Ivonne Higuero,
CITES Secretary-General

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Dear participants,

Greetings from Geneva.

I am very grateful to our colleagues of the IUCN Species Survival Commission for inviting me to speak at the Reverse the Red Pavilion, as we mark the first hybrid meeting of the IUCN World Conservation Congress.

IUCN, and the thousands of volunteer experts that participate in the Species Survival Commission, are key partners in the work of both CITES Parties and the Secretariat. The species-specific expertise that the specialist groups of the SSC bring to our discussions and decision-making is valued as an authoritative, objective source of information that contributes to numerous CITES processes, while the Convention itself is historically tied to IUCN.

I am therefore delighted to be able to join you for this occasion. IUCN and CITES have a long history of collaborating to ensure that Parties' decisions are supported by the best available science. We also work together to reinforce science-based and legally binding instruments that allow for the long-term conservation of wild fauna and flora, their habitats, and the ecosystems they sustain.

IUCN's Red List and the SSC's expertise stretch well beyond the species presently covered in the CITES Appendices. But it presents us and Parties with a valuable tool to inform us on the status of species that may currently not be within our scope of work, but which could one day become a part of it. This is increasingly becoming a part of conversations within the CITES family.

At the latest meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES in 2019, for example, Parties agreed to examine the conservation and trade status of non-CITES listed songbirds, amphibians, and redwoods. They sought to evaluate what role, if any, CITES could play in contributing to their long-term conservation. This is an example that shows where IUCN's broad species-specific expertise is regarded as essential.

The CITES Secretariat and IUCN signed a memorandum of understanding in July 1999, which formally acknowledged IUCN as a "major technical advisor to the Convention".

IUCN expertise is also a key element of the substantial documentation that serves to inform Parties during key moments of the Convention's calendar, most notably during the CoP meetings. This is when decisions are made about the listing of species in the CITES Appendices.

CITES shares the vision towards which the SSC is working. Both aim to reinforce positive action aimed at conserving wildlife and biodiversity. This is why we are glad to embrace the movement towards “reversing the red" and ensuring that species that may be vulnerable now can be conserved in the long term, or even make a comeback.

With this in mind, we shall be discussing sustainable use of wildlife as a powerful tool to support species conservation, a principle to which CITES and IUCN are both committed.

But before that, please allow me to provide you with a short reminder of the purpose and scope of the Convention.

What is CITES?

CITES stands for the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. It is a multilateral environmental agreement signed in 1973, which entered into force in 1975. CITES currently has 183 Parties.

CITES is both a trade-related and a conservation-related convention. It uses trade-related measures to achieve its prime conservation objective: to ensure that international trade in specimens of CITES-listed species of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival in the wild.

The Convention regulates commercial and non-commercial international trade in over 38,000 species of animals and plants, including their parts and derivatives.

What kind of trade is covered by CITES?

CITES provisions apply to international movements of all ‘specimens’ of CITES-listed species, be it whole live plants or animals, or any of their derivatives. This includes finished products, skins, meat, blood, bones, wood, waxes, oils, fruits, amongst others.

By trade, we mean all imports, exports, re-exports and introductions from the sea.

Consequently, the Convention is relevant to a wide range of sectors and businesses that rely on, or trade in CITES-regulated species and specimens.

Examples include housing, agriculture and sustenance industries, with regulations on several fish species or wild meat. We can also cite furniture, with provisions for the trade in timber from trees such as mahogany or rosewood.

But we can also point to the cosmetic and pharmaceutical industries, which use many medicinal plants; fashion and clothing, which use reptile and mammal skins, furs, or fibres from wild animals; or the leisure, tourism, pet trade and ornamental plant sectors, among many more.

How does CITES work?

Each Party is tasked with implementing these differing controls by adopting specific legislation, including penalties for breaches of key provisions, and appointing national CITES Management Authorities, which are advised by nationally appointed Scientific Authorities.

Species are placed in three different Appendices, with different controls over international trade depending on the Appendix. All kinds of taxa are present in the Appendices

Appendix I includes species that are threatened with extinction. Some 700 species of fauna and some 400 species of flora are listed here.

Appendix II includes species that are not necessarily threatened with extinction, but for which trade must be controlled to avoid threats to their survival.

Appendix II also includes a large number of so-called "look-alike" species. These are species that are very similar to other species for which conservation is a major concern, and which non-expert enforcement officials and border control personnel cannot be expected to tell apart from their endangered peers.

Appendix II includes roughly 32,000 plants, 500 mammals, 1,200 birds, 800 reptiles, 170 amphibians, 100 fish and 2,200 invertebrates.

Finally, Appendix III includes some 200 species for which a single country is asking other Parties to help with its protection.

For species in Appendix I, commercial international trade in wild-taken specimens is generally prohibited. This includes commercial trade in, for example, elephant ivory, rhino horn, great apes, marine turtles, tigers or pangolin specimens and derivative products.

By contrast, all trade in species in Appendix II and Appendix III is permitted, but subject to regulations to ensure it is legal, traceable, and non-detrimental to the survival of said species.

Generally speaking, trade is permitted for most species in the CITES Appendices. Appendix I represents some 3% of all CITES-listed species. The remaining 97% of species are listed in Appendices II and III. They can be traded commercially subject to regulations.

The Convention sets out three requirements for anyone who engages in trade of species listed in Appendices I or II:

- Making a legal acquisition finding to certify that the specimens have been taken in accordance with national law;

- Making a non-detriment finding. This is a science-based biological sustainability finding that advises on the levels of exports, taking account of the role of the species in its ecosystem; and

- Issuing the appropriate permit/certificate– this is the formal authorization and the basis for subsequent controls along the trade chain - and report the trade transaction to the CITES Secretariat on an annual basis.

Changes to the CITES Appendices

CITES is a dynamic convention and Parties meet every 3 years at the Conference of the Parties to consider proposed changes to the listings in the Appendices based on new information. These changes can take multiple forms, with the inclusions of new species, or the down-listing or up-listing of species already present in the Appendices.

In all cases, IUCN expertise plays an important role in providing information and advice to Parties on the trade, conservation and biological status of species, and in supporting the formulation of their assessments and proposals.

CITES also reviews the Appendices regularly to ensure that species are listed in the correct Appendix, through a process called the Periodic Review of the Appendices. The IUCN Red List assessments are very important in this regard.

For example, the Corsican swallowtail (Papilio hospiton), a species of butterfly that was included in CITES Appendix I in 1987, following a proposal by the United Kingdom. The species had been classified as Endangered but based on an increasing population it was reclassified as Least Concern by IUCN in 2010.

Consequently, at its 25th meeting, in 2011, the CITES Animals Committee selected the Corsican swallowtail for review and, at CoP16 in 2013, a proposal to transfer the species from Appendix I to App II was approved by CITES Parties.

CITES trade in wildlife: some facts and figures

I would like to share some data that will provide you with an overview of CITES trade. While it is difficult to put a single figure on the value of the overall trade in CITES-listed species, given its scale, we do know this figure runs in the billions of US dollars every year, that it underpins millions of jobs and provides for the livelihoods of rural and indigenous communities on all continents.

Article 8 of the Convention stipulates that Parties to CITES must “maintain records of trade in specimens of species included in Appendices I, II and III”. These records are compiled on mandatory annual reports that all Parties must share with the Secretariat.

These reports contain detailed breakdowns of individual transactions. Among other pieces of information, this includes the species and type of specimen that is being traded, the list of importers and exporters, and the purpose of transactions.

This data is compiled and made available to the public on the CITES trade Database, which is maintained by UNEP-WCMC on behalf of the CITES Secretariat. The database contains the records of over 20 million transactions involving CITES-listed species since the Convention entered into force in 1975. Parties have reported an average of a million transactions every year.

From this data, we know that, between 2015 and 2020, the top-five Parties in terms of the export of CITES-listed species, as reported by exporters, were:

- China
- Thailand
- Turkey
- The Netherlands
- and Georgia

We also know that, for the same period, the top five global importing Parties as reported by exporters, were the following countries:

- Germany
- The Netherlands
- Vietnam
- The United States of America
- Turkey

We can also see that the majority of CITES trade involves plants as reported by Parties between 2015 and 2020. Reptiles and birds follow but are at a distant second and third place. Trade in mammals takes up the 7th place in this ranking.

CITES and sustainable use

Sustainable use is defined as follows:

"the use of components of biological diversity in a way and at a rate that does not lead to the long-term decline of biological diversity, thereby maintaining its potential to meet the needs and aspirations of present and future generations".

This concept is at the core of CITES, which falls in the nexus between trade, conservation, and development. Its mandate spans from conserving biodiversity, to building opportunities for resilient and sustainable livelihoods and economic opportunities for communities who most closely rely on nature.

Parties have recognized that legal, sustainable, and traceable trade can be beneficial to conservation efforts and to the well-being and livelihoods of such communities.

Take the Appendix-II listing of 3 species of teatfish, or sea cucumbers, which entered into force in August 2020. These sea cucumbers are the cornerstone of a sizeable and lucrative fishing industry in the Indo-Pacific region, which is thought to involve up to three million small scale fishers.

The teatfish commercial value had led to unsustainable harvesting, which made it necessary to put in place regulations for international trade to support their long-term conservation. Parties thus agreed to list the species in Appendix II after CoP18.

There are other benefits to trade in wild plants and animals. For example, the manufacturing of species-derived products and the production, processing and handling of wildlife for trade can generate incentives to conserve species, ecosystems and the services they provide.

Where economic value can be attached to wildlife, and a controlled management system is implemented, favourable conditions can be created for investment in the conservation and the sustainable use of the resource. This reduces the risks to wildlife from conversion of wildlife habitats to other uses.

Parties have different approaches in assigning economic value to wildlife, through both consumptive and non-consumptive means. In Resolution Conf. 17.9, CITES Parties agreed on a strong and restrictive framework for trade in hunting trophies of species listed in Appendix I or II. This framework requires that trophy hunting is sustainably managed, does not undermine the conservation of target species and, as appropriate, provides benefits to local communities.

South Africa, for example, considers trophy hunting as an opportunity for rural development and poverty alleviation, contributing to job creation, economic development and improvement of living standards of communities in rural areas of South Africa, with low income households benefitting significantly. They have estimated that trophy hunting generates more than 5 billion South African Rands (US$ 341 million) every year and supports more than 17 000 employment opportunities.

As stated in Resolution Conf. 8.3 (Revised at CoP13), Parties recognized that the implementation of CITES-listing decisions should take into account potential impacts on the livelihoods of the poor. They also acknowledge that effective implementation of CITES decisions can form part of a strategy to provide sustainable livelihoods for rural communities, consistent with UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Parties, partners and the Secretariat have sought to gather data on the impacts of sustainable use of listed species on both the species' status and on the livelihoods of communities that rely on them.

At CoP18, Parties agreed to conduct new case-studies that demonstrate how sustainable use of CITES-listed species contributes to both livelihoods and species' conservation. Over 30 new case-studies were collected from countries in Africa, Asia, Europe, Oceania, North America and South America, involving a wide range of species. These case-studies were also made possible by the significant support of IUCN specialists and their data.

Among these cases, you might be familiar with that of the vicuñas. These Andean camelids are found at high altitudes in the South American Altiplano, and their fine silk-like wool has been prized for centuries. In the early 20th century, vicuñas were nearly brought to extinction because of high demand for their wool. They were placed in CITES Appendix I in 1975 and have since experienced a sustained recovery, also becoming the basis for a sustainable wool industry that has benefited local Andean communities.

Some other examples where a link between sustainable wildlife management and species recovery has been demonstrated in the context of CITES, include,

1. The Bald eagle

When the United States adopted the bald eagle as its national symbol in 1782, it is estimated that there was a population of 250,000 birds. Subsequent intense hunting, unintentional

poisonings, habitat destruction and other factors conspired to decimate eagle populations continent-wide. By 1963, there were only 417 nesting pairs.

The bald eagle was therefore listed in CITES Appendix I in 1977. As a result of conservation actions and legal protection measures, the population of bald eagles throughout much of the species' range rebounded dramatically by almost 780% over 40 years. As a result, at CoP13 in 2004, CITES Parties approved a U.S. proposal to transfer bald eagles from Appendix I to Appendix II, reflecting their improved status.

2. the Cape mountain zebra

The cape mountain zebra was listed on CITES Appendix I on 1 July 1975. At CoP17, in 2016, South Africa, its only range State, sought to transfer it from Appendix I to Appendix II and implement a sustainable hunting quota. At the time, its population comprised a minimum of 4,791 individuals in no less than 75 subpopulations.

In this case, South Africa argued that private ranchers played an important role in conserving the population of the Cape mountain zebra. Authorities also asserted that this role could potentially increase if economic incentives were in place to encourage them not to switch to more profitable species. CITES Parties then agreed to transfer the Cape mountain zebra to Appendix II.

3. the Moreletii crocodile

Mexico has more than 85% of the population of Moreletii crocodiles and a ban on the export of the wild specimens. Government, educational and scientific institutions worked closely in the sharing of knowledge regarding the species and its conservation.

A series of targeted conservation interventions, coupled with the sustainable use of species from captive breeding facilities to meet the market demand, assured the recovery of the species in the wild. The result of these efforts is the sustainable management of the species and protection of its habitat.

Another example is Queen conch, which has a long history in CITES and is a success story for many range States in many respects.

The species was listed in CITES Appendix II in November 1992 given concerns with overfishing, illegal landings and trade, and a rapid decline in the species' numbers due to increased demand for this luxury food.

There were extensive reviews of scientific information and management practices relating to Queen conch following its listing. These led to CITES Parties proposing a range of actions in the mid-nineties and early 2000s to improve the sustainability and legality of the fishery and trade.

Most Caribbean countries and dependent territories where Queen conch occurs acted to implement these measures. These included export quotas, temporary trade suspensions, harmonized fishery rules and better controls.

The listing of Queen conch further prompted numerous collaborative initiatives to promote its recovery, reduce overfishing and ensure legal, sustainable trade. All of this has led to improvements in the conservation and management of the resource.

These examples demonstrate how CITES regulations accompanied by the long-term aim of sustainable use may lead to conservation successes. And the remaining CITES livelihoods case-studies show various similar successes with species including mammals like the Ibex and markhor in Central Asia; medicinal and aromatic plants like South Africa's Cape Aloe; reptiles like the Saltwater Crocodile in Australia; and fish like the pirarucu in the Amazonian basin.

Reverse the Red and the post 2020 GBF

You will have heard in this pavilion that the Reverse the Red initiative aims to “ignite optimism and collaborative action to guarantee the survival of all species and the ecosystems they live in. Reverse the Red means to reverse the declining trajectory of species and ecosystems in the Red List and to empower communities around the world to make this happen".

These objectives are clearly echoed in the CITES mandate. CITES Parties are committed to reversing negative trajectories for a very large number of species while also fostering sustainable livelihoods for their citizens, in accordance with the Sustainable Development Goals.

In this context, and in conclusion, one work area that I wanted to highlight in this forum is the tasks laid out under Decisions 18.28 and 18.29, which CITES Parties agreed on at CoP18.

These Decisions instruct the CITES Secretariat and the Animals and Plants Committees to identify and prioritize among the species in CITES Appendix I those animals and plants that could benefit from future actions under CITES. Appendix I currently includes about 1,100 species.

These decisions are aimed at those species that are considered most threatened with extinction in the CITES Appendices. The majority of them are also listed as “Endangered” or “Critically Endangered" in the IUCN Red List.

In consultation with range States, the CITES Secretariat will produce detailed assessments for species that will be selected by the Animals and Plants Committee. These assessments will look at the conservation status, threats, relevance of trade, ongoing in situ and ex situ conservation strategies or recovery plans, and funding or resources available or required for further action.

The Animals and Plants Committees must formulate recommendations, as appropriate, for communication to the range States and for the consideration at the next meeting of the Conference of the Parties, in November 2022.

This work is ongoing, and it has clear links with the Reverse the Red initiative and for the practical implementation of the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework. The Global Framework builds on the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity for 2011-2020, and it sets out an ambitious plan to bring about a transformation in our relationship with nature.

By implementing specific actions to conserve some of the most vulnerable species in the CITES Appendices, CITES Parties will be directly contributing to the objectives of initiatives like Reverse the Red. Conversely, IUCN's Reverse the Red can help create awareness in the CITES community for meaningful species-specific actions, and monitor and inform about progress. Ultimately, these efforts will help us all reach the objective that is shared by CITES, IUCN and all organizations and individuals working to tackle the global crisis of biodiversity loss: that of living in harmony with nature.

We look forward to continuing our invaluable collaboration with IUCN and work together to ensure the conservation and recovery of species under threat.

Thank you for your time.