

CONVENTION ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE IN ENDANGERED SPECIES  
OF WILD FAUNA AND FLORA



Nineteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties  
Panama City (Panama), 14 – 25 November 2022

Species specific matters

ILLEGAL TRADE IN CHEETAHS (*ACINONYX JUBATUS*)

1. This document has been submitted by Ethiopia.\*

Background

2. The cheetah, a CITES Appendix I species, is now confined to just 9% of its historical range with a global population estimate of only 7,100<sup>1</sup>. The illegal poaching and trade of cheetahs is a serious threat to their survival. It is for that reason that Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda introduced the issue of illegal trade in cheetahs and put it on the agenda of CITES meetings since the sixteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (Bangkok, Thailand, 2013; CoP16 Doc. 51<sup>2</sup>).
3. This CoP16 document outlined widespread reports of illegal trade in live specimens, the majority relating to cubs, with a high percentage of the cheetahs allegedly dying either during transit or shortly after confiscation. It was the first time the illegal trade in cheetahs was officially discussed at CITES.
4. From CoP16 to this date, several studies<sup>3,4,5,6</sup> have been conducted, increasing knowledge on trade levels, geographical spread, and main drivers. It is now known that the illegal wildlife trade is a major conservation concern for the cheetahs, especially threatening the Horn of Africa local subspecies, *A.j. soemmeringii*, with extinction. There is a risk that this subspecies may disappear within our lifetime if the trade is not stopped.
5. A 2020 peer-reviewed study analysed illegal cheetah trade incidents between 2010 and 2019<sup>7</sup>. It identified 1,884 individual incidents involving at least 4,184 live cheetahs, parts and products. The dataset includes 2,316 online advertisements involving 528 sellers and 2,298 cheetahs, believed to be wild sourced. Almost

\* The geographical designations employed in this document do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the CITES Secretariat (or the United Nations Environment Programme) concerning the legal status of any country, territory, or area, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. The responsibility for the contents of the document rests exclusively with its author.

<sup>1</sup> Durant, Sarah M., Nicholas Mitchell, Rosemary Groom, Nathalie Pettorelli, Audrey Ipavec, Andrew P. Jacobson, Rosie Woodroffe et al. "The global decline of cheetah *Acinonyx jubatus* and what it means for conservation." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 114, no. 3 (2017): 528-533; also CoP18 Inf. 73, Annex 1: <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/cop/18/inf/E-CoP18-Inf-073.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/cop/16/doc/E-CoP16-51.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Initial study conducted after CoP16 through Decisions 16.71 to 16.75, which mandated the Secretariat to commission a study on illegal trade in cheetahs, whose findings were presented to the 27<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Animals Committee (Veracruz, Mexico, 2014) in Document AC27 Doc. 18, <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/com/ac/27/E-AC27-18.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Tricorache P, Yashphe S, Marker L. Global dataset for seized and non-intercepted illegal cheetah trade (*Acinonyx jubatus*) 2010-2019. *Data Brief*. 2021 Feb 8;35:106848. doi: 10.1016/j.dib.2021.106848. PMID: 33644272; PMCID: PMC7893423. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2352340921001323>

<sup>5</sup> UNODC's 2020 World Wildlife Crime Report; <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/wildlife.html>

<sup>6</sup> Tricorache, P. and Stiles, D. Live Cheetahs (Black Market Brief). *Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime* (2021). <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/live-cheetahs/>

<sup>7</sup> The study was introduced to the CITES Standing Committee 74 meeting through Document SC74 Doc. 62, submitted by Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia and Yemen. This document included references also to: Tricorache, P. and Stiles, D. Live Cheetahs (Black Market Brief). *Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime* (2021). <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/live-cheetahs/>.

90% of these advertisements were on social media. During the last year for which data was collected (2019), 90 incidents representing 182 live cheetahs were recorded, as well as 5 incidents involving skin and teeth. Of the 56 implicated countries cited in the paper, Somalia, Kenya and Ethiopia were the range States with the highest number of incidents, while Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and UAE were the most significant transit and destination countries. Eight Horn of Africa and Arabian Peninsula countries<sup>8</sup> represent ~95% of all identified incidents worldwide, involving over 3,800 cheetahs.<sup>9</sup> The document also reported that trafficking in live cheetahs has continued throughout the COVID-19 pandemic period. Between March 2020 and February 2021, a 58% increase on the previous 12 months was recorded for the Horn of Africa-Yemen trade route<sup>10</sup>. It is therefore understood that this is a regional problem, spanning the Horn of Africa and Arabian Peninsula, affecting Parties across the supply chain. Indeed, the paper also notes that fifteen of seventeen range States with National Conservation Action Plans recognise illegal trade in cheetah as a threat to country populations.

6. The initial study conducted post CoP16, and presented at the 27th CITES Animal Committee meeting in 2014 (AC27 Doc. 18<sup>11</sup>) and the 65th meeting of the Standing Committee (SC65 Doc. 39 Rev. 2<sup>12</sup>), recommended that Parties along the trade chain adopt actions relevant to legislation, enforcement, cooperation, demand reduction and dealing with confiscated cheetah. These have been the recommendations of meetings of CITES Animals Committee ([AC27 Doc. 18](#)), and Standing Committees SC65 (2014); [SC66 Doc. 32.5](#) (2016); and [SC69 Doc. 45](#) (2017). Important outcomes of these meetings as they relate to cheetah trade are as follows:
- a) In 2015, a dedicated face-to-face workshop recommended by the SC65 was convened in Kuwait City, Kuwait, where a number of range and destination countries met to discuss the illegal trade in cheetahs. It was the only time such a regional meeting was convened, focusing on the trade and discussing information offered by Parties. The Standing Committee established an intersessional working group to facilitate this process. The workshop's outcome was a set of recommendations, later published by the intersessional working group as official recommendations to the 66<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Standing Committee ([SC66 Doc. 32.5](#)<sup>13</sup>).
  - b) These SC66 recommendations offered, once again, the need to work all along the trade chain to curb cheetah trafficking. This time, however, the recommendations were much more detailed, offering Parties to adopt a set of actions ranging from the launching of awareness and demand reduction campaigns to increasing enforcement action and promoting regional information exchange. The nature of the trade, namely of it being of live animals and dominated by online sales, led to the inclusion of unique recommendations on humane and proper placement of animals confiscated by authorities as well as on tackling online crime. Establishment of a closed cheetah user group, a dedicated forum on the CITES website, and a cheetah trade toolkit for enforcement agencies were also recommended.
  - c) At its 17th meeting (CoP17), the Conference of the Parties adopted Decisions 17.124 to 17.130 on Illegal trade in cheetahs, which mandated the Secretariat to further develop the toolkit and to report to the Standing Committee on progress made by Parties on the SC66 recommendations outlined above.
  - d) An update on Parties' implementation of the SC66 recommendations was provided by the Secretariat at SC69 ([SC69 Doc. 45](#)<sup>14</sup>). Such efforts included any progress made on decisions relating to public awareness and education, cooperation and information exchange, enforcement, and suitable disposal options. Parties efforts were assessed based on: a) information submitted in response to the Secretariat's [Notification to the Parties No. 2017/039](#) (15 May 2017)<sup>15</sup>; and b) responses to a questionnaire to Parties ([Annex to Notification to the Parties No. 2018/058](#) (4 June 2018)<sup>16</sup>. Unfortunately, only one Party, Yemen, replied to notification 2017/039. As for notification 2018/058,

---

<sup>8</sup> Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait, Somalia, Qatar, Ethiopia, Yemen, Kenya.

<sup>9</sup> See 5 above.

<sup>10</sup> See 7 above.

<sup>11</sup> <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/com/ac/27/E-AC27-18.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/com/sc/65/E-SC65-39.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/com/sc/66/E-SC66-32-05x.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/com/sc/69/E-SC69-45.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> [https://www.cites.org/sites/default/files/notif/E-Notif-2017-039\\_0.pdf](https://www.cites.org/sites/default/files/notif/E-Notif-2017-039_0.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.cites.org/sites/default/files/notif/E-Notif-2018-059-A.pdf>

replies were received from 17 Parties<sup>17</sup> and one non-Party<sup>18</sup>; however, these did not include reports by known key Parties affected by the trade<sup>19</sup>. The Secretariat also informed the Standing Committee of the development of the Joint CMS-CITES African Carnivores Initiative, focusing on cheetahs (*Acinonyx jubatus*), African wild dogs (*Lycan pictus*), African lions (*Panthera leo*) and leopards (*Panthera pardus*).<sup>20</sup>

- e) Key issues raised and agreed upon at the 70<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Standing Committee<sup>21</sup> included the need to finalise the CITES cheetah toolkit and to ensure that Parties: use the cheetah closed user group; adopt measures to reduce trade online through implementation of paragraphs 11 and 12 of Resolution Conf. 11.3 ([Rev. CoP17<sup>22</sup>](#)); develop national strategies for the placement of confiscated animals ([CoP17 Conf. 17.8 Annex 3<sup>23</sup>](#)); and conduct demand reduction activities ([CoP17 Conf. 17.4<sup>24</sup>](#)). At SC70, the United States joined the conversation and voiced its concern in regard to the illegal trade in cheetahs.
  - f) At the 71<sup>st</sup> meeting of the Standing Committee (Geneva, Switzerland, 2019), the Secretariat was tasked with the revision and promulgation of the enforcement toolkit.
7. At CoP 18, the Secretariat offered a document ([CoP18 Doc.60<sup>25</sup>](#)) which reported on progress with the establishment of the African Carnivores Initiative and, to abide by Decision 17.127, on progress in the implementation of the SC66 recommendations. The creation of the [webpage for cheetahs<sup>26</sup>](#) on CITES' website was reported as was a closed user group on cheetah on the WCO CENComm platform for information exchange ([SC66 Doc 32.5 Rec. 18 d\) and e\)](#)). As mentioned above (see SC69 summary), reports on progress with regards to other SC66 recommendations, namely those that relate to Parties' actions against the trade, reflected partial information. Yet, the Secretariat proposed the deletion of the CoP17 Decisions, apart from the need to finalise the cheetah toolkit. The CoP adopted this Decision as Decision 18.193, as the partial information offered represented only limited levels of trade in cheetahs, not necessitating targeted actions<sup>27</sup>
  8. Also at CoP18, Kenya and Ethiopia submitted [CoP18 Inf. 73<sup>28</sup>](#), Annex 1, which highlighted the critical status of global cheetah populations and the serious impact the illegal trade had on their survival. This document brought to light more information as to the scale of the cheetah trade, including crucial data from key primary source jurisdictions, such as Somalia's northwest region of Somaliland, one of the main trafficking routes for cheetahs out of Africa.
  9. CoP18 Inf. 73, emphasised the trade's impact on the extremely small population of the most affected subspecies, the *A.j.soemmeringii* of the Horn of Africa. Information included in this document, as well as awareness and engagement efforts of source countries with the Secretariat and destination countries, increased the understanding that far from being 'limited', the illegal international trade in cheetahs continues to be a significant and urgent threat to wild populations of cheetahs.
  10. Post COP18, destination, transit, and source countries increased their focus on strong legislation, the building of dedicated wildlife crime units for enforcement, and are now looking into potential avenues for demand reduction efforts. Yet, with the cheetah population of the Horn of Africa dwindling at an alarming rate, and with poaching and trafficking events still happening, there is a regional understanding that more work is needed.

---

<sup>17</sup> Angola, Bahrain, Benin, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Namibia, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, South Africa, Thailand, United Arab Emirates, Yemen, Zambia and Zimbabwe

<sup>18</sup> South Sudan

<sup>19</sup> Kenya, Ethiopia and the north-western part of Somalia

<sup>20</sup> See 16 above.

<sup>21</sup> <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/com/sc/70/exsum/E-SC70-Sum-09-R1.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/document/E-Res-11-03-R18.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/document/E-Res-17-08.pdf> (Annex 3)

<sup>24</sup> [https://cites.org/sites/default/files/document/E-Res-17-04\\_0.pdf](https://cites.org/sites/default/files/document/E-Res-17-04_0.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/cop/18/doc/E-CoP18-060.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> [https://cites.org/eng/prog/terrestrial\\_fauna/cheetahs](https://cites.org/eng/prog/terrestrial_fauna/cheetahs)

<sup>27</sup> <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/com/sc/70/E-SC70-43.pdf>

<sup>28</sup> <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/cop/18/inf/E-CoP18-Inf-073.pdf>

11. At CoP18, it was offered that the cheetah trade will be addressed through the Big Cat Task Force and the Joint CMS-CITES African Carnivores Initiative, and the following decisions were adopted:
  - a) Decision 18.245 on the creation of a Big Cats Task Force that would focus on big cat species in Asia, Africa and Latin America, subject to prior review by the Standing Committee of its draft terms of reference, membership and *modus operandi*.
  - b) Decision 18.246 mandated the Secretariat to conduct further research into trade in African lion and other big cats “to better understand trends, linkages between trade in different species, and the commodities in trade which contain, or claim to contain, such specimens.”
  - c) Decisions 18.56 to 18.61, on the setting up of a joint African Carnivores Initiative between CITES and the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), which would cover African Wild Dog (*Lycaon pictus*), Cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus*), Leopard (*Panthera pardus*) and Lion (*Panthera leo*).
12. The 13<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS CoP13, 2020) endorsed the African Carnivores Initiative by adopting [CMS Resolution 13.4](#)<sup>29</sup> which, *inter alia* tasked the initiative with developing and implementing conservation strategies for each of the four African carnivore species *which address all threats to their survival* (italics added), this last phrase being added on the recommendation of the CMS Scientific Council to reflect the need to include the illegal trade of cheetahs, and was fully endorsed by the CMS Parties.
13. Even though progress has been made in including consideration of the illegal trade in cheetah through the Big Cats Task Force (BCTF) and the CITES-CMS African Carnivores Initiative (ACI), the range and transit countries of Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Yemen were still concerned and voiced this concern at SC74 (2022). The concern arose from the need to act quicker and the reality of the BCTF’s and ACI’s work being extremely delayed due to COVID-19. In addition, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, and Yemen acknowledged the Secretariat’s efforts to oversee reporting on the recommendations agreed by SC66. However, they raised the concern that during that time, sight had been lost of the implementation of these recommendations by individual range, transit and destination countries.
14. Therefore, in [SC74, Doc 62](#), Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Yemen offered that due to the urgency of the situation, an in-session working group should be struck to address the illegal trade in cheetahs as a regional issue. The proposal was that affected Parties -- source, transit, and destination -- will meet to discuss a strategy to combat this trade together. This is reminiscent of the first (and only) regional meeting on the topic, the 2015 workshop chaired by Kuwait. Such an in-session working group could prepare recommendations for submission to the 19<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Conference of the Parties, including recommendation on the establishment of a Working Group of the Standing Committee at the CoP to analyse and report on recommendations on cheetahs made in the Big Cats Task Force and report at CoP20.
15. Unfortunately, due to an already extensive agenda and time constraints at SC74, the Chair offered that an in-session working group would not be possible. The 74<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Standing Committee “noted with appreciation document SC74 Doc. 62, expressed its concern about the ongoing illegal trade in cheetahs and invited Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia and Yemen, as well as other interested Parties, to submit to CoP19 draft decisions on illegal trade in cheetahs” ([SC74 Sum. 6 Rev. 1](#))<sup>30</sup>. The Chair suggested that affected Parties convene unofficially. An informal working group convened during SC74, with attendance by Parties, NGOs, INTERPOL and the CITES Secretariat. The CITES Secretariat presented draft Decisions, upon which the draft Decisions contained here in Annex 1 are based.
16. Ethiopia and Somalia acknowledge that in the future, several matters relating to cheetah can be addressed through the CITES Big Cats Task Force and the African Carnivores Initiative. However, there remains uncertainty over how these bodies will operate going forward, and the level of attention that will be given to the unique characteristics of the illegal trade in live cheetah, most of which involves cubs sourced from dwindling populations in the Horn of Africa and thus poses an urgent threat to already severely threatened cheetah populations in the region (and is fundamentally different to the illegal trade in other big cats). They strongly believe in the need to act on a regional scale to tackle this trade, with leadership offered by both key source and destination countries.

---

<sup>29</sup> [https://www.cms.int/sites/default/files/document/cms\\_cop13\\_res.13.4\\_cites-cms-carnivores-initiative\\_e.pdf](https://www.cms.int/sites/default/files/document/cms_cop13_res.13.4_cites-cms-carnivores-initiative_e.pdf)

<sup>30</sup> <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/com/sc74/exsum/E-SC74-Sum-06-R1.pdf>

## Recommendations

17. Accordingly, Ethiopia and Somalia recommend that, as a matter of urgency, the 19<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties:
  - a) ensure that the mandate and Terms of Reference for the Big Cat Task Force include a clear and specific requirement for it to consider measures which address, in particular, the illegal trade in live cheetah cubs, working with range, transit and destination States as appropriate; and
  - b) adopt the draft decisions in Annex 1.

DRAFT DECISIONS ON  
*ILLEGAL TRADE IN CHEETAHS (ACINONYX JUBATUS)*

**Directed to Parties**

- 19.AA Source, transit and destination Parties affected by illegal trade in live cheetahs shall work collaboratively to tackle this regional illicit activity. This should be done through:
- a) adopting strong national legislation encompassing all links of the trade chain, from poaching and trafficking to illegal sale and possession, while ensuring implementation with the relevant in-charge institutions. Parties with advanced legislation and strong penalties should share best practices with other affected Parties resulting in harmonised, effective legal frameworks.
  - b) increasing national and cross border enforcement action, with Parties with advanced intelligence and enforcement capabilities supporting other affected Parties through knowledge, intelligence, and best practice exchanges. Use of existing official intelligence exchange channels such as INTERPOL | 24/7 and the cheetah closed user group on the World Customs Organization CENcomm platform is recommended.
  - c) make use of available tools and information and share new best practices and news of supportive policies and laws adopted by Parties, e.g., the Cheetah webpage on the CITES website and the final draft Guidance for CITES Parties to Develop and Implement Demand Reduction Strategies to Combat Illegal Trade in CITES Listed Species.
  - d) report to the 77<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Standing Committee on their efforts to combat illegal trade in live cheetahs, including ongoing implementation of agreed recommendations found in SC66 Doc. 32.5, and in SC70 SR with a view to making any recommendations.
  - e) as appropriate, review their implementation of paragraph 12 under “Regarding wildlife crime linked to the Internet”, in Resolution Conf. 11.3 (Rev. CoP18) on *Compliance and enforcement* in relation to illegal trade in cheetah, and pursue the full implementation of these provisions.
  - f) make full use of INTERPOL’s Practical Guidelines for Law Enforcement Practitioners on Wildlife Crime Linked to the Internet, and the webpage on “Wildlife Crime linked to the Internet” on the CITES website.
  - g) draw upon the capacity of the INTERPOL Global Complex for Innovation in Singapore, for advice and assistance in their efforts to combat illegal trade in cheetahs linked to the Internet.

**Directed to the Standing Committee**

- 19.BB At its 77<sup>th</sup> meeting the Standing Committee shall:
- a) consider information available on cheetah trafficking and make recommendations, for consideration by the 20<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties. To this end, the Committee may wish to establish an in-session working group consisting of source, destination and transit countries for cheetah trafficking, and organisations and individuals as appropriate, in order to consider the information provided by Parties in response to Decision 19.AA, alongside any outcomes from the Big Cat Task Force and any other relevant information.
  - b) subject to external funding, convene a face-to-face workshop of Parties affected by illegal trade in cheetahs and other relevant intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations in order to address prevailing issues and concerns related to the illegal take and trade of cheetah, taking into account the expertise of enforcement personnel, cheetah specialists, CITES Authorities and the CITES Secretariat. Such a workshop would allow the review and exchange of information and the formulation of targeted recommendations to address the illegal take and trade in cheetahs which could be provided to the Standing Committee for consideration at their 78<sup>th</sup> meeting.

***Directed to the Secretariat***

- 19.CC Invite INTERPOL and other ICCWC members to support source, transit and destination Parties to combat illegal trade in live cheetahs.

TENTATIVE BUDGET AND SOURCE OF FUNDING  
FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF DRAFT RESOLUTIONS OR DECISIONS

According to Resolution Conf. 4.6 (Rev. CoP18) on *Submission of draft resolutions, draft decisions and other documents for meetings of the Conference of the Parties*, the Conference of the Parties decided that any draft resolutions or decisions submitted for consideration at a meeting of the Conference of the Parties that have budgetary and workload implications for the Secretariat or permanent committees must contain or be accompanied by a budget for the work involved and an indication of the source of funding. The Secretariat proposes the following tentative budget and source of funding.