

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

Thirty-second meeting of the Animals Committee
Geneva (Switzerland), 19 – 23 June 2023

Species conservation and trade

Fauna

WEST AFRICAN VULTURES (ACCIPITRIDAE SPP.)

1. This document has been prepared by the Secretariat.
2. At its 19th meeting (CoP19, Panama City, 2022), the Conference of the Parties adopted Decisions 19.192 to 19.196 on *West African vultures (Accipitridae spp.)*. The complete set of Decisions are included in Annex 1 to the present document.

Decisions 19.192 and 19.193

3. The Secretariat issued Notification to the Parties [No. 2023/049](#) of 19 April 2023 to collect information from West African vulture range States, Parties and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations on the implementation of Decisions 19.192 and 19.193. The deadline for submission of information is 19 May 2023.
4. The Secretariat also reached out to the West African range States for *Gyps africanus* (Whitebacked vulture), *Gyps fulvus* (Griffon vulture), *Gyps rueppelli* (Rüppell's vulture), *Necrosyrtes monachus* (Hooded vulture), *Neophron percnopterus* (Egyptian vulture), *Torgos tracheliotos* (Lappet-faced vulture) and *Trionoceph occipitalis* (White-headed vulture) through electronic means to inform them about the Notification that was issued. The Secretariat urges West African range States to provide it with information as envisaged by the Decision, to facilitate reporting to the Animals Committee and Standing Committee, as appropriate. Responses received by the Secretariat will be made available to the Animals Committee as an Annex to the present document.

Decision 19.194, paragraph a) and b) – enforcement related aspects

5. With regard to paragraph a) of Decision 19.194, the illegal trade in vultures is not addressed as a species-specific issue, but rather through broader responses to address wildlife crime. Where relevant and feasible, the Secretariat will continue to draw attention to this illegal trade in its engagement with the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICWC) partner organizations, regional and subregional wildlife enforcement networks, and competent national authorities.
6. [Operation Thunder 2022](#), a month long global operation targeting wildlife crime led jointly by INTERPOL and the World Customs Organization (WCO) in October 2022, brought together police, customs, financial intelligence units, wildlife and forestry enforcement agencies from 125 Parties (the largest number of Parties to take part in a Thunder operation since the series started in 2017). The Secretariat notes that none of the Parties that participated in Operation Thunder 2022 reported any seizures of West African vulture specimens traded illegally at international level. As pointed out in document [CoP18 Doc. 97](#) on *West African vulture trade and conservation management*, the most significant threats facing West African vultures are the mortality caused by intentional poisoning in the form of poison bait that is set illegally for the deliberate collection of vultures or their parts as fetishes for belief-based use, and by poachers deliberately targeting vultures to prevent them from drawing the attention of wardens to illegally killed elephants, so-called sentinel

poisoning. The document further states that of nearly 8,000 vulture deaths recorded from 26 countries in the past 30 years, poisoning (both intentional and unintentional) accounted for 61% of the deaths and belief-based use accounted for 29% of the deaths (as signified by headless carcasses or other parts being sold in markets). It continues to be likely that illegal activities affecting vultures are primarily of a domestic nature, with limited illegal trade occurring at international level.

7. With regards to paragraph b) of Decision 19.194, the Secretariat estimates the cost of the production of identification materials focusing on parts and derivatives of vulture species for use by law enforcement officials at USD 30,000 (see Notification [No. 2023/024](#) on *Status of funding for the implementation of valid decisions after CoP19*). At the time of writing, the Secretariat has not secured funds to implement paragraph b) of Decision 19.194. The Secretariat reached out to Parties and relevant stakeholders through Notification to the Parties [No. 2023/051](#) (*Request for materials for the identification of specimens of CITES-listed species*) inviting them to share any identification materials focusing on parts and derivatives of vulture species or any relevant information that will support the production of such materials.

Decision 19.194 paragraphs c), d) and e) – Support to range States on trade-related aspects of the Multi-species Action Plan to Conserve African-Eurasian Vultures ([Vulture MsAP](#))

8. Decision 19.194, paragraph c), directs the Secretariat to liaise with the Secretariat of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) **to assist in the implementation of the trade-related aspects** of the CMS Vulture MsAP 2017-2029 subject to external funding, while paragraph d) (also subject to external funding) directs the Secretariat to support the implementation of capacity-building activities aimed at providing support to the West African range States in implementing these trade-related aspects of the CMS Vulture MsAP. The Secretariat will determine the estimated cost associated with the implementation of paragraphs c) and d) based on the information to be provided by the West African range States in the response to CITES Notification to the Parties No. 2023/049 and as per Decision 19.192 paragraph e) that requires the range States to identify any trade-related issues associated with the implementation of the Vulture MsAP of CMS.
9. The Secretariat had initial discussions with the CMS Secretariat to discuss potential trade-related aspects in the CMS Vulture MsAP and the CMS [Strategic Implementation Plan approved by the CMS Parties](#). In this regard, Objectives 4 and 11 in the CMS Vulture MsAP are relevant as well as one of the 11 project concepts (“Combating the trade in threatened vultures and their parts for belief-based use”: details included in Annex 2 to the present document) for ‘flagship projects’ included in the CMS Strategic Implementation Plan to deliver the CMS Vulture MsAP. The project concept is a preliminary project outline and a full project document will have to be developed before it can be implemented. The total cost of implementing the entire CMS Strategic Implementation Plan of 11 projects was estimated in early 2018 at approximately USD 9 million. The trade related vulture focused project concept in the CMS Strategic Implementation Plan has the following two objectives:
 - To reduce the threat to vultures from belief-based use of the birds and their parts.
 - To assess the threat to human health from the consumption of poisoned vulture parts.

A list of potential activities have been identified (situation analysis, market surveys, population impact studies, awareness campaigns, stakeholder engagement and capacity building, strengthened policy, strengthened law enforcement) and the estimated implementation cost is USD 600,000.00. As with other potential flagship project concepts, a detailed project logframe has not been developed. Some initiatives aimed at moving this project concept forward have been implemented, including the development and submission of the suite of draft Decisions on West African vultures for discussion at CoP19.

10. The Secretariat was also informed by the CMS Secretariat about the following processes that are underway:
 - a) A training of Guinea-Bissau authorities was implemented in May 2022 to improve preparedness and capacity to deal with wildlife poisoning incidents.
 - b) As part of a West African vulture persecution threat analysis report, a literature review and a threat mapping were compiled as a background analysis to support the development of a regional action plan (“West African Vulture Conservation Action Plan”).
 - c) The development of a West African Vulture Conservation Action Plan initiated in October 2022 through a workshop held in Abuja, Nigeria that brought together CMS National Focal Points, CITES National Authorities, other government representatives, as well as academia and non-governmental

organizations from Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal. The plan addresses the following threats to vulture populations in the region: i) killing of vultures for belief-based use; ii) trade and use of vultures for belief-based use; iii) cultural perceptions and beliefs around vultures; and iv) indirect persecution.

- d) The final report of the mid-term review of the Vulture MsAP to assess its implementation is expected in early 2024.
11. Paragraph e) of Decision 19.194 directs the Secretariat to work in collaboration with the CMS Secretariat to consider available trade data and conservation status information from the whole geographic range of the vulture species concerned for inclusion in its reporting to the Animals and Standing Committees. At its 31st meeting (AC31; online, June 2021), the co-chair of the intersessional working group on West African vultures introduced the report, *West African vultures – a review of trade and sentinel poisoning* (2021) prepared by the United Nations Environment Programme-World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC) for the European Commission and the CITES and CMS Secretariats (see information document [AC31 Inf. 10](#)) ([AC31 SR](#)). This report includes a global overview of international trade in all CITES-listed vulture species.
12. The Secretariat prepared a summary of direct international trade data covering the period 2000 to 2022 in Annex 3 to the present document. Based on direct trade transactions over the period, *Gyps africanus* (White-backed vulture) and *Gyps fulvus* (Griffon vulture) are the two species most traded. The main sources of the specimens in trade are wild and captive-bred; and trade included live specimens, bodies, trophies, feathers and eggs. The Secretariat notes that the number of trade transactions seems to have declined over time. The Animals Committee could consider whether a formal analysis is required considering the low numbers of transactions recorded.

Decisions 19.195 directed to the Animals Committee

13. In terms of paragraph a) of Decision 19.195, the Animals Committee shall encourage West African range States to undertake a Periodic Review of the vulture species referred to in Decision 19.192 pursuant to Resolution Conf. 14.8 (Rev. CoP19) on *Periodic Review of species included in Appendices I and II*, taking note of the offer of the Vulture Specialist Group of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) to assist range States in such an effort. The Animals Committee representatives for Africa could reach out to the West African vulture range States to engage the IUCN in this regard.
14. With regards to paragraph b) of Decision 19.195, the Animals Committee shall consider any reports or requests for advice submitted by Parties with respect to the making of non-detriment findings (NDF) for trade in CITES-listed West African vulture species. At the time of writing the document, the Secretariat has not received a NDF for West African vulture species and was not aware of any requests from Parties relating to NDFs for West African vulture species. Parties may have reached out to the Committee members directly to request support. It should be noted that, as part of the process to implement Decision 19.132 on Non-detriment findings, a workstream on birds was established to further elaborate guidance on non-detriment findings.
15. As per paragraph c) of Decision 19.195, the Animals Committee shall consider the reports and recommendations of the Secretariat submitted in accordance with Decision 19.194, paragraph e).

Recommendations

16. The Animals Committee is invited to:
- a) encourage West African range States to undertake a Periodic Review of the vulture species referred to in Decision 19.192 pursuant to Resolution Conf. 14.8 (Rev. CoP19) on *Periodic Review of species included in Appendices I and II*, and to engage the Vulture Specialist Group of the International Union for Conservation of Nature, as needed;
 - b) consider and respond to requests for advice submitted by Parties with respect to the making of non-detriment findings for trade in CITES-listed West African vulture species, when received;
 - c) note the information submitted by the Secretariat in accordance with Decision 19.194, paragraph e); and

- d) make recommendations as appropriate for consideration by range States, Parties, the Standing Committee and the Secretariat.

DECISIONS ADOPTED AT COP19
ON WEST AFRICAN VULTURES (*ACCIPITRIDAE SPP.*)

Directed to West African range States (Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo)

19.192 West African range States for *Gyps africanus* (Whitebacked vulture), *Gyps fulvus* (Griffon vulture), *Gyps rueppelli* (Rüppell's vulture), *Necrosyrtes monachus* (Hooded vulture), *Neophron percnopterus* (Egyptian vulture), *Torgos tracheliotos* (Lappet-faced vulture), and *Trigonoceps occipitalis* (White-headed vulture) are urged to:

- a) integrate illegal vulture trade considerations into their implementation of the West Africa Strategy on Combatting Wildlife Crime (WASCWC) and any decisions relating to Wildlife crime enforcement support in West and Central Africa adopted by the Conference of the Parties at its 19th meeting;
- b) ensure that national laws to protect vultures and control trade in vulture parts and derivatives are effectively implemented, and ensure that penalties for non-compliance are sufficient to deter illegal trade;
- c) ensure that any international trade in West African vultures is not allowed except in accordance with CITES requirements, and if international trade is found not to be in accordance with CITES requirements, consider implementing a zero export quota;
- d) follow Resolution Conf. 16.7 (Rev. CoP17) on *Non-detriment findings*, and, in cases where there is an interest in exporting globally threatened vulture species, consider submitting non-detriment findings for the export of vulture specimens to the Secretariat for inclusion on the CITES website and review by the Animals Committee;
- e) identify any trade-related issues associated with the implementation of the Multi-species Action Plan to Conserve African-Eurasian Vultures (Vulture MsAP) 2017-2029 of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS);
- f) work with relevant experts and organizations for implementing demand reduction strategies for vultures and their parts and derivatives including for belief-based use and consumption and, where appropriate, expand the implementation of strategies that have been successful;
- g) work with relevant organizations to initiate wide-scale public awareness campaigns at regional, national and local levels about the impacts of trade in these species, including the importance of vulture species to ecology and human health, the negative impacts of belief-based use of vulture body parts, and existing national and international legislation that protects vultures; and
- h) provide information to the Secretariat on the implementation of this Decision to assist it in reporting to the Animals Committee and Standing Committee, as appropriate.

Directed to Parties, West African range States and relevant intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations

19.193 Parties, West African range States and relevant intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations are encouraged, subject to resources, to:

- a) collaborate in the conservation and restoration of West African vultures and support the implementation of the Multi-species Action Plan to Conserve African-Eurasian Vultures (Vulture MsAP) 2017-2029 of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS); and
- b) gather and exchange scientific knowledge and expertise on West African vultures, with a particular focus on:

- i) documenting the scale of vulture trade by surveying markets in and outside West Africa, and identifying inter-regional and international trade routes;
- ii) characterizing links between poisoning and trade in vultures, and contributing to the African Wildlife Poison Database; and
- iii) updating the conservation and population status information of West African vultures, and *Gyps africanus* (white-backed vultures), *Gyps rueppellii* (Rüppell's vultures) and *Torgos tracheliotus* (lappet-faced vultures) in particular.

Directed to the Secretariat

19.194 The Secretariat shall:

- a) cooperate with the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICCWC) partner organizations, regional and subregional wildlife enforcement networks, and competent national authorities, where relevant and feasible, to consider vultures in the context of ICCWC's enforcement and capacity-building efforts in West Africa;
- b) subject to external funding, support the production of identification materials focusing on parts and derivatives of vulture species for use by law enforcement officials;
- c) liaise with the Secretariat of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) to assist in the implementation of the trade-related aspects of the Multi-species Action Plan to Conserve African-Eurasian Vultures (Vulture MsAP) 2017-2029 subject to external funding, and share information based on the work of the Animals Committee;
- d) subject to external funding, support the implementation of capacity-building activities aimed at providing support to the West African range States in implementing the trade-related aspects of the Vulture MsAP;
- e) in collaboration with the CMS Secretariat, consider available trade data and conservation status information from the whole geographic range of the vulture species concerned for inclusion in its reporting to the Animals and Standing Committees; and
- f) collect information from West African vulture range States on their implementation of Decision 19.192, and report as appropriate this and other information on the implementation of Decisions 19.192 to 19.194, paragraphs a), b), c), d) and e) to the Animals Committee and Standing Committee, at their first regular meetings following the 19th meeting of the Conference of the Parties with conclusions and recommendations for their consideration.

Directed to the Animals Committee

19.195 The Animals Committee shall:

- a) encourage West African range States to undertake a Periodic Review of the vulture species referred to in Decision 19.192 pursuant to Resolution Conf. 14.8 (Rev. CoP19) on *Periodic Review of species included in Appendices I and II*, taking note of the offer of the Vulture Specialist Group of the International Union for Conservation of Nature to assist range States in such an effort;
- b) consider any reports or requests for advice submitted by Parties with respect to the making of non-detriment findings for trade in CITES-listed West African vulture species;
- c) consider the reports and recommendations of the Secretariat submitted in accordance with Decision 19.194, paragraph e): and
- d) make recommendations as appropriate for consideration by range States, Parties, the Standing Committee and the Secretariat.

Directed to the Standing Committee

19.196 The Standing Committee shall review the implementation of Decisions 19.192 to 19.195 and make recommendations as appropriate to West African vulture range States, Parties and the Secretariat, and for consideration by the Conference of the Parties at its 20th meeting.

TRADE RELATED ASPECTS EXTRACTED FROM VULTURE MSAP AND STRATEGIC IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Vulture MsAP – Objective 4 and 11

Objective 4: To reduce and eventually to halt the trade in vulture parts for belief-based use.

- *Indicator:* Significant reduction in vulture mortality due to belief-based use as a result of greater public awareness and the introduction of appropriate legislation, including effective implementation and enforcement by 2029.
- *Means of verification:* Number of CMS Parties and Range States where public awareness-raising campaigns have been enacted and with effective legislation and regulations are in place, implemented and enforced.
- *Result 4.1:* Improved understanding of the trade in vultures and their parts informs improved conservation approaches.

Six actions:

- 4.1.1 Conduct overall situation analysis on belief-based use of vultures and their body parts, to include: current state of knowledge, best practices for tackling the trade, body parts used, market turnover rates, how vultures are acquired, key markets, socio-economic drivers of the trade and trade pathways.
 - 4.1.2 Assess population effects on vultures of trade from body parts for belief-based use.
 - 4.1.3 Assess policies, laws and regulations governing the use, sale, distribution and disposal of poisons and illegal use of agro-chemicals used to poison wildlife, especially vultures, for belief-based use.
 - 4.1.4 Investigate and test best practices to eliminate the trade in vulture parts for belief-based uses.
 - 4.1.5 Determine protocols for sampling and promote the establishment or use of suitable facilities to do advanced and accurate toxicological assessment of samples in range countries. Identify human health impacts of use and consumption of vulture body parts for belief-based use.
 - 4.1.6 Identify human health impacts of use and consumption of vulture body parts for belief-based use.
- *Result 4.2:* Governments, local communities and other stakeholders understand scale and impact of trade in and belief-based use of vulture body parts.

Two actions:

- 4.2.1 Initiate engagement and dialogue with relevant stakeholders, publish and share research and monitoring results on belief-based use of vultures with relevant Government departments (e.g. environment, agriculture, health) and other stakeholders to agree appropriate national actions.
 - 4.2.2 Implement multi-media awareness campaigns to highlight negative (human health and ecological) impacts of belief-based use of vulture body parts; target public (especially suppliers, traditional healers, religious leaders, consumers and youth), using research results.
- *Result 4.3:* All appropriate policy instruments and legal measures are established and/or aligned to reduce belief-based use of vulture body parts.

One action:

- 4.3.1 Train customs and law enforcement officers to identify vultures and their body parts to enable effective confiscation and enforcement actions, particularly at borders.

Objective 11: To support vulture conservation through cross-cutting actions that contribute to addressing knowledge gaps.

- *Indicator:* Ten Endangered and Critically Endangered Old World Vultures listed on CMS Appendix I; all species of vultures are fully protected within the national legislation of all respective Range States by 2029.
- *Means of verification:* Number of CMS Parties and Range States with effective legislation in place, implemented and enforced.
- *Result 11.1:* Increased understanding of basic biological and ecological parameters and threats influencing vulture populations.

Action relevant to trade:

- 11.1.7 Conduct a detailed assessment on the scale and impact of legal and illegal trade in live birds, eggs and vulture body parts across the range of the Vulture MsAP.

Strategic Implementation Plan – Project Concept (extract from Strategic Implementation Plan)

Rationale

Trade through wildlife markets involving threatened vultures and their parts for belief-based use is a serious and neglected problem in Western and Southern Africa. This needs to be reduced, and alternative solutions promoted where possible.

Project objectives

- To reduce the threat to vultures from belief-based use of the birds and their parts.
- To assess the threat to human health from the consumption of poisoned vulture parts.

Key activities

- Situation analysis.
- Market surveys.
- Population impact studies.
- Awareness campaigns, stakeholder engagement and capacity building.
- Strengthened policy.
- Strengthened law enforcement.
- Identification and promotion of alternatives.

Expected results

- Belief-based trade and use of threatened vulture species significantly reduced in target countries.
- Belief-based use of vultures/vulture parts replaced by alternatives.

(Vulture MsAP results supported 4.2: “Governments, local communities and other stakeholders understand scale and impact of trade in and belief-based use of vulture body parts”. 4.3: “All appropriate policy instruments and legal measures are established and/or aligned to reduce belief-based use of vulture body parts”.)

Lead organisations: BirdLife International (West Africa), Endangered Wildlife Trust (Southern Africa).

Other collaborators: US Fish & Wildlife Service.

Geographical scope: Southern and West Africa.

Timeframe: 3 years.

Approximate budget: USD 600,000.

SUMMARY OF DIRECT TRADE DATA COVERING THE PERIOD 2000 TO 2022

The data in the CITES Trade Database for the seven focal species of West African vultures (*Gyps africanus*, *Gyps fulvus*, *Gyps rueppellii*, *Necrosyrtes monachus*, *Neophron percnopterus*, *Torgos tracheliotus* and *Trigonoceps occipitalis*) for the period 2000 to 2022 was analyzed. The dataset included 815 aggregated trade records, of which 555 were direct trade records. The following graphs were prepared based on the aggregated trade records:

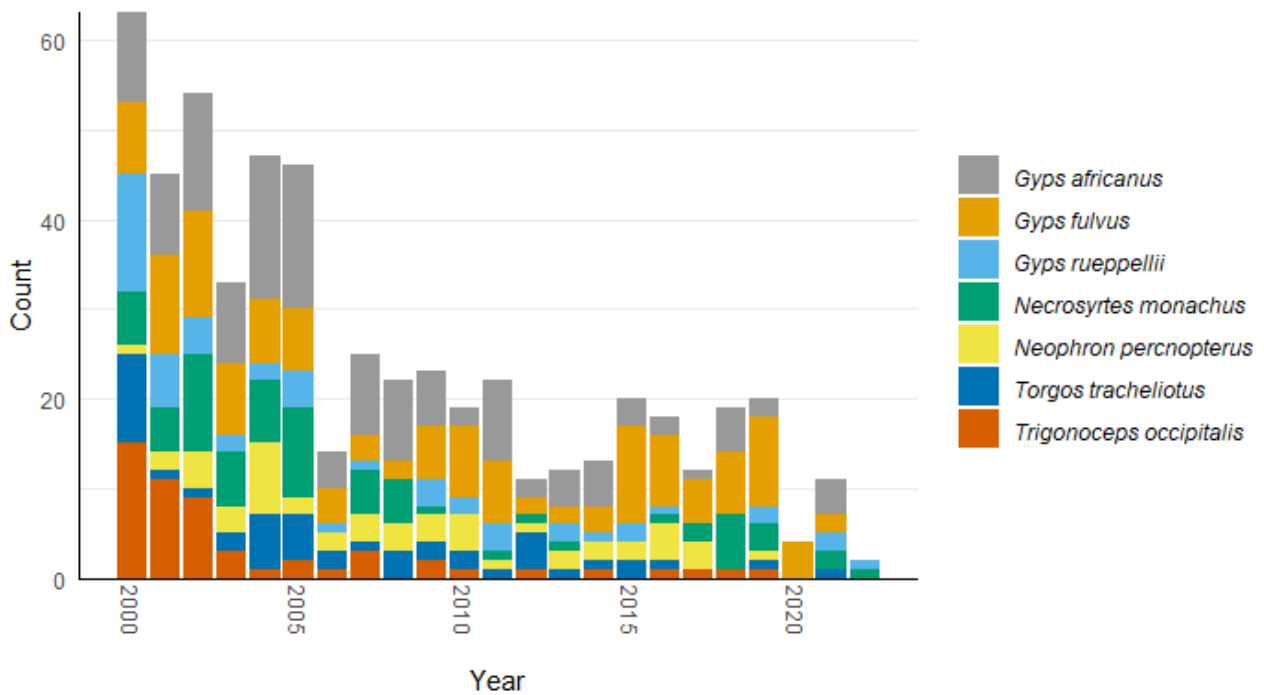


Figure 1. The total number of recorded trade transaction in the CITES Trade Database of direct trade between 2000 and 2022 per year and **colored by species**.

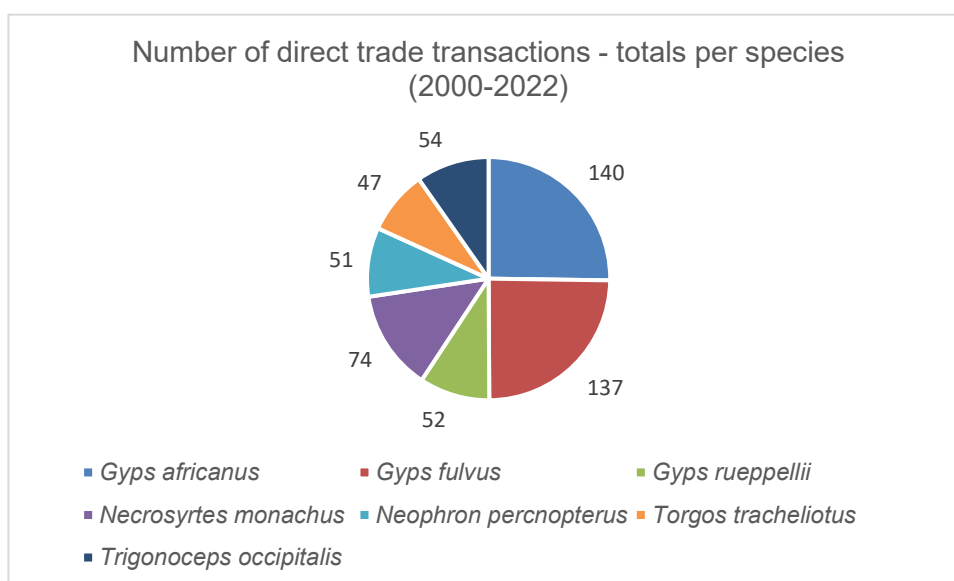


Figure 2. The total number of recorded trade transaction in the CITES Trade Database of direct trade between 2000 and 2022 **per species**.

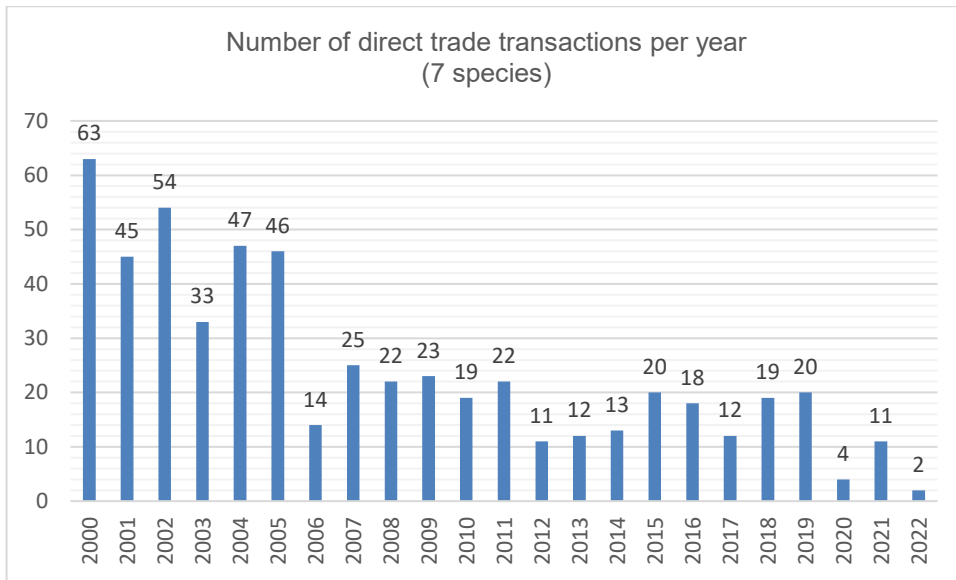


Figure 3. The total number of recorded trade transaction in the CITES Trade Database of **direct trade per year** between 2000 and 2022 (transactions for 7 species combined per year).

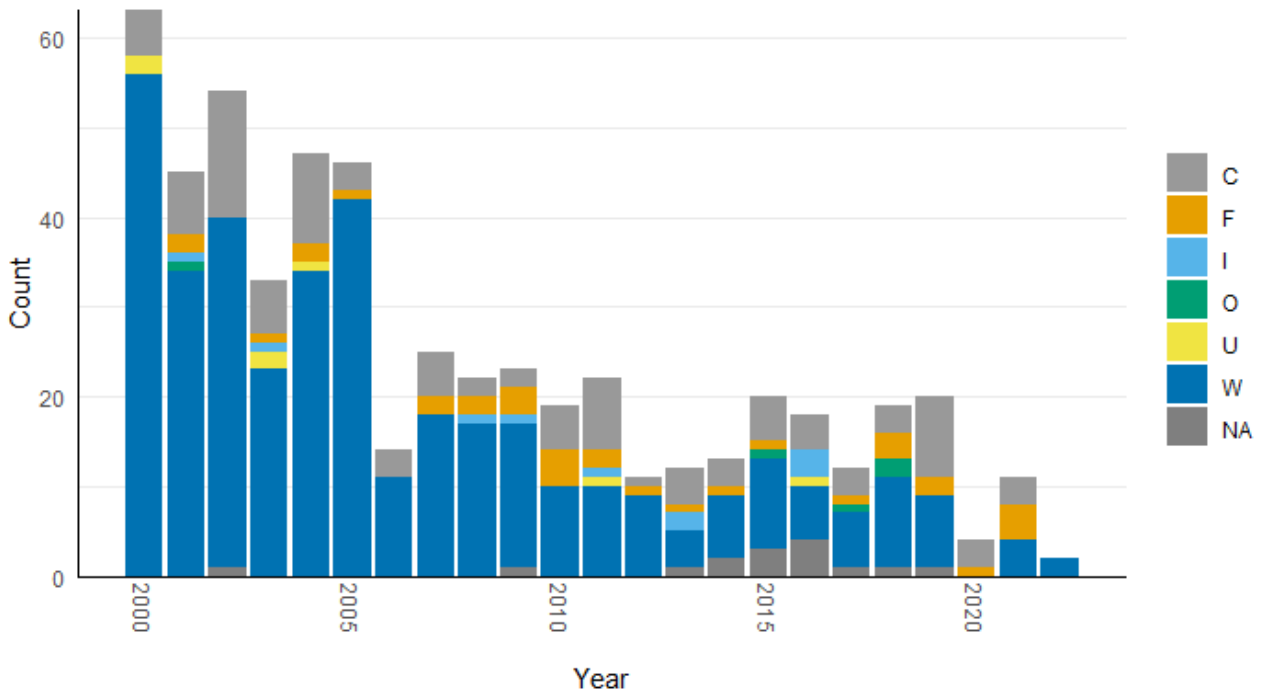


Figure 4. The total number of recorded trade transaction in the CITES Trade Database of direct trade between 2000 and 2022 **colored by source code**.

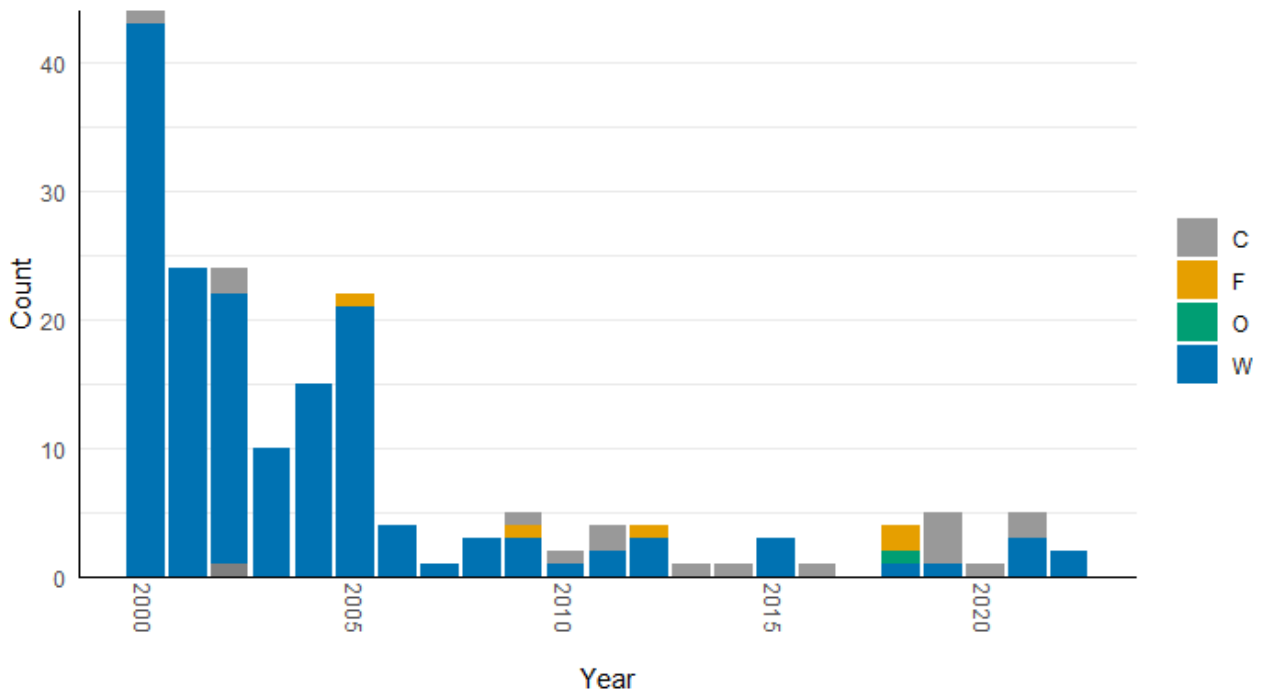


Figure 5. The total number of recorded **commercial trade transactions** in the CITES Trade Database of direct trade between 2000 and 2022 **colored by source code**.

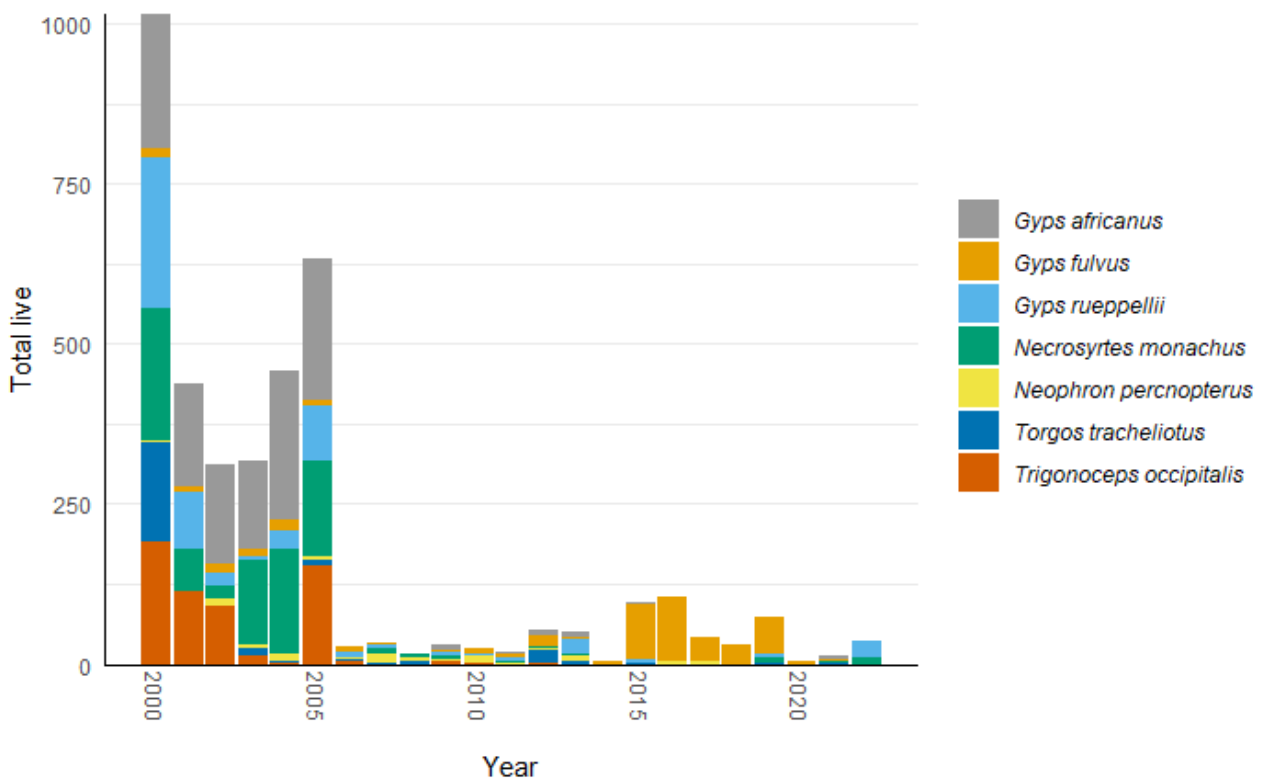


Figure 6. The total sum of **live animals** recorded in the CITES Trade Database of direct trade between 2000 and 2022 **colored by species**.

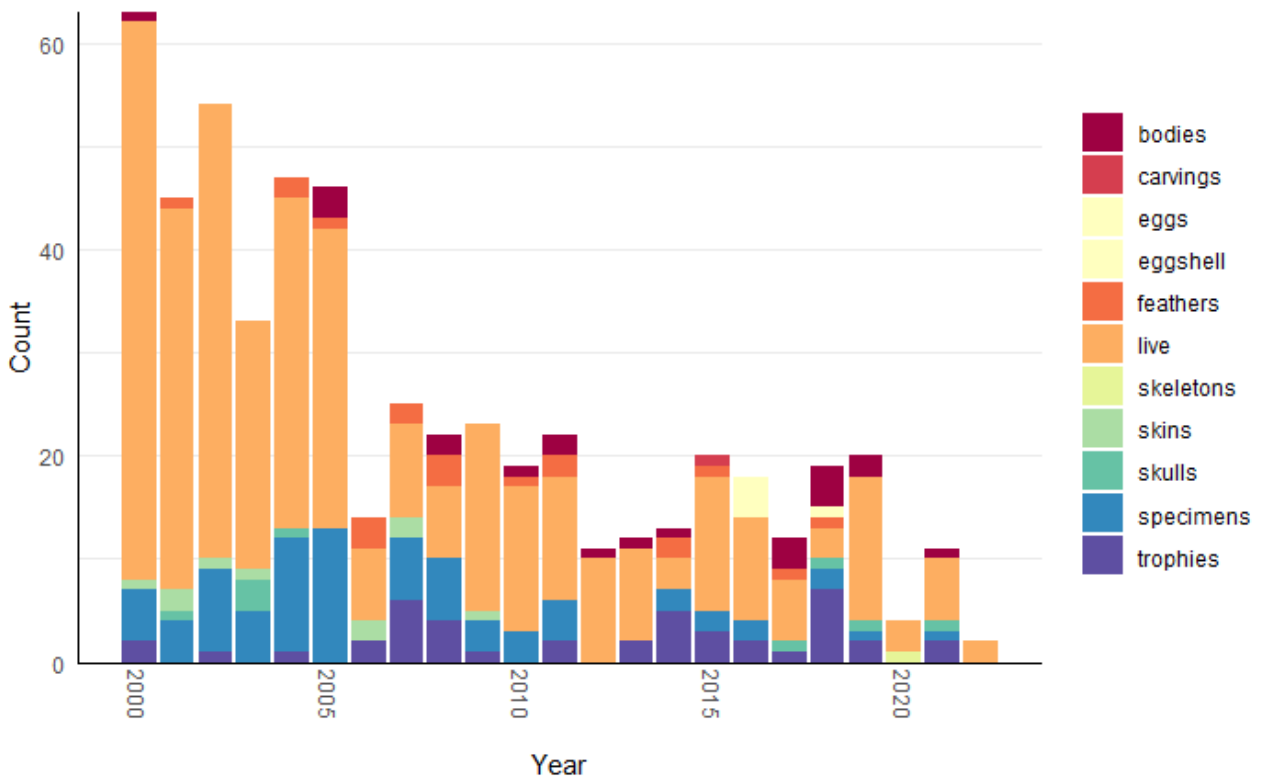


Figure 7. The total number of records in the CITES Trade Database of direct trade between 2000 and 2022 colored by “term” (specimens).

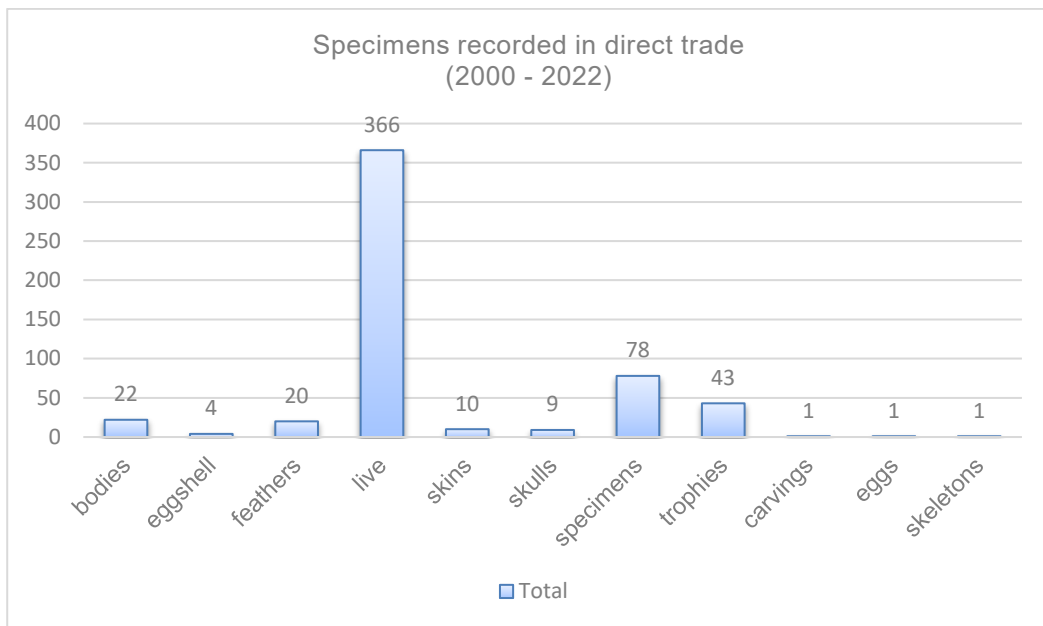


Figure 8. The total number of records in the CITES Trade Database of direct trade between 2000 and 2022 by “term” (specimens).

Breakdown per species – direct trade transactions per year (2000 – 2022):

