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## Foreword by Ivonne Higuero, CITES Secretary-General



This has been a tough couple of years. The COVID-19 pandemic reached into all areas of life and has taken a toll. Our work has, of course, continued – and we have learned to work in different ways. Through this period, I am proud of how the Secretariat has managed to continue to offer effective support to the Parties to CITES as they manage the international trade in endangered species of wild fauna and flora.

It is, as yet, too soon to be able to tell the impact of the pandemic on the trade that we regulate, over the period that this report covers. There is evidence that volumes have decreased, as international travel was limited or stopped but the full reports that will give the detail are still coming in. It will be interesting to see the extent of the impact of the pandemic on the trade that underpins so many lives and economies and see too whether there are any lessons or insights we can gain that can make us even more effective in the future.

We are now moving into our fiftieth year, and it is always in our minds that the Convention was born from the recognition that unregulated international trade can threaten the viability of entire species. In 1973, what was foresight, is today reality. A million species of animals and plants may be threatened with extinction, so the work we do has both importance and urgency.

Human wellbeing is founded on the sustainable use of nature but the current relationship needs to change. We are a part of nature and the health of species, wildlife and planet are inextricably linked. There is now overwhelming scientific evidence that human activity is polluting and heating the planet and impacting nature at rates that are unsustainable without catastrophic impacts. We know too that these crises are interconnected and we cannot hope to tackle one problem without addressing all. So, while CITES remains focused on its core mandate, it is also charged with contributing to the conservation of global biodiversity and we are doing this through cooperation with other Multilateral Environmental Agreements and bodies who are involved in combating the triple planetary crisis.

This coming year sees us convene a meeting of the Conference of the Parties – CITES' ultimate decision-making body. It is almost a cliché – but certainly not hyperbole – to suggest that it comes at a crucial time and that its decisions will lay the foundations for all that we must do over the coming years. We have a vision in which, by 2030, all international trade in CITES-listed species is legal, traceable and sustainable. As we, hopefully, emerge from this pandemic period, we must redouble our efforts to conserve species, biodiversity and ecosystems. We must be focused, pragmatic and bold if we are to meet the global goals we are mandated to address and committed to achieve – and forge a different and more sustainable relationship with nature.

# Background & Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic affected the running of the Secretariat of the Convention in International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) as it affected the world. Staff worked from home during the lockdown and only gradually, over the period covered by this report, returned to the Secretariat's offices.

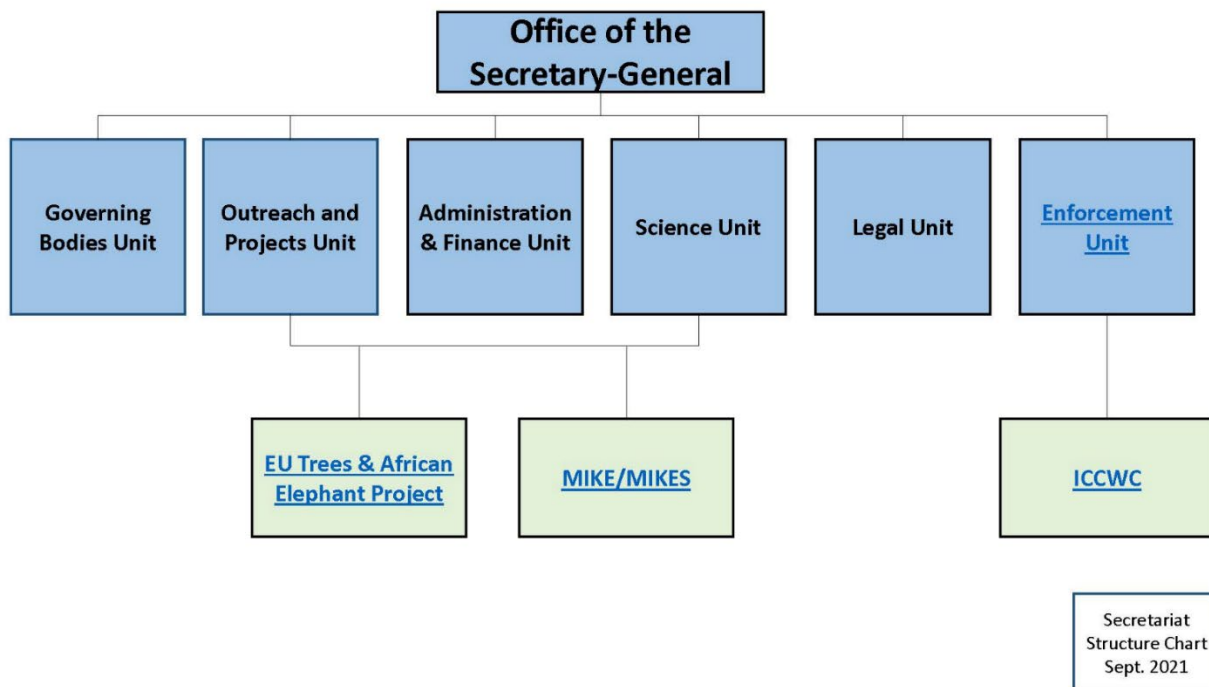
This report covers the years 2020 and 2021. The extraordinary nature of operating conditions, due to the pandemic, has affected working life in any number of ways – one of which being the publication of this Annual Report. This combined report is intended to be a one-off, and the publication will return to being annual, next year.

Every effort was made to continue the core functions of the Secretariat over this time and the support offered by the Secretariat remained in place for the 184 Parties to the Convention [During the period covered by this report, Andorra acceded to the Convention and became the 184<sup>th</sup> Party]. In-person meetings were cancelled. Almost without exception, these meetings were rearranged to take place online. Indeed, attendance for some of these meetings was up, as the complications and costs of travel were removed.

A restructuring of the Secretariat was carried out during this period (in September 2020), to bring it more in line with the modern demands being placed upon it. This restructuring resulted in the following units:

- Office of the Secretary-General
- Administration and Finance Unit
- Enforcement Unit
- Governing Bodies Unit
- Legal Unit
- Outreach and Projects Unit
- Science Unit

Organized in the following structure:



More details on the structure and function of the individual units can be found in section VI.

## I. Impact of COVID-19 on CITES

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted States around the world, including all CITES Parties. It significantly disrupted everyday life and with it, in all probability, the implementation of CITES for many Parties.

Measures taken by governments to halt the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic led to restrictions on the ability of employees to attend their place of work; restrictions on the numbers of people gathering together at meetings; and international travel restrictions, caused by lack of transportation possibilities, quarantine obligations or border controls.

To understand better the pressure Parties were working under, the Secretariat carried out three online surveys to obtain information relating to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the work of the Management and Scientific Authorities and enforcement focal points; the experiences of the Committee Members, Parties and other observers that participated in the first ever online meetings of the Standing Committee (SC), Animals Committee (AC) and Plants Committee (PC) in 2021; and the experiences of the Committee Members, Parties and observers that attended the first face-to-face meeting of the Standing Committee in 2022 after the COVID-19 pandemic period – during which no face-to-face CITES meetings took place.

The Secretariat received 109 responses from 52 Parties across all six regions (Africa: 12; Asia: 12; Central and South America and the Caribbean: 11; Europe: 12; North America: 3 and Oceania: 2). 61% of the responses received were from CITES Management Authorities, 22% from CITES Scientific Authorities, six percent (6%) from enforcement agencies, and the remainder from non-governmental organizations and other observers.

It should be noted that the COVID-19 pandemic period covered by the survey included the impact experiences in 2020 and ended in April 2021 (the deadline for submission of the survey). Respondents completed the questionnaire based on the main area of work impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Most of the respondents completed the questions associated with the impact of COVID-19 on their work environment with the majority indicating that they were moderately impacted in their work environment and worked from home for a period of 1 to 3 months.

More than 80% of respondents that had to perform duties from home had access to some basic equipment (computer, internet connectivity) required to fulfil some of their duties and responsibilities and e-mail was the communication tool used most by respondents, followed by mobile phones and messaging services. Two-thirds of the respondents indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic did result in slower processing times and responses to enquiries.

The main responses on the following areas covered by the questionnaire include:

- Coordination between national governmental authorities implementing and enforcing the Convention: Most of the respondents indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic made it somewhat more difficult to implement and enforce the Convention and that the pandemic had a moderate impact on the coordination between national governmental authorities implementing and enforcing the Convention. Reasons provided included resource constraints, challenges associated with effective communication and the impact on inspections due to movement restrictions associated with national lockdowns.
- Issuance and verification of permits and certificates; making of legal acquisition findings and non-detriment findings; and inspection of consignments and other CITES documentation: Respondents indicated that issuance and verification of permits were moderately impacted but 80% of the respondents indicated that the number of permits issued decreased. Most of the respondents indicated that legal acquisition findings were moderately impacted and that the making of non-detriment findings were either very or moderately impacted by COVID-19 measures.
- CITES Parties were further impacted by restrictions relating to movement to carry out field work, access to information and challenges associated with consultation with relevant stakeholders: Only a few respondents indicated that the ability of enforcement agencies to inspect consignments and other CITES documentation were extremely impacted, while most of the respondents indicated it was moderately impacted.
- In terms of inspections, respondents indicated that, in some instances, verification had to be done through photos of the consignments and accompanying documentation because staff were not allowed to do inspections in person. Most of the respondents also indicated that imports, exports and re-exports decreased in 2020, according to data available to them. Reasons stated included closure of ports; the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic; reduced transport; and delays in permitting. Future analysis of the international trade transactions during this period may be of interest to determine overall impact on levels of international trade.
- Reporting obligations: None of the respondents indicated that the ability of the Management Authority to fulfil its Party's reporting obligations were extremely impacted. Two-thirds reported that the preparation of the annual trade report was negatively impacted, while more



than half of the respondents indicated that the preparation of the annual illegal trade report was negatively impacted.

- All respondents indicated that the preparation of the implementation report was negatively impacted. Reduced resources, lockdown measures, delays in capturing information and challenges associated with the available bandwidth to transmit data were recorded as aspects associated with the COVID-19 pandemic that impacted the ability of Management Authorities to fulfil reporting obligations. Respondents indicated that the Secretariat should expect delays in reporting and deadlines should be extended.
- Participation in face-to-face international meetings (any type of conference, seminar, workshops, etc.): More than half of the respondents' ability to participate in face-to-face international meetings was extremely impacted and more than 80% of respondents attended no face-to-face meetings in 2020. More than half of the respondents participated in between 1 and 6 online international meetings in 2020. 80% of respondents indicated that they had to defer some of their work because of their inability to participate in face-to-face workshops and other meetings, whether at national or international level.
- Preparation of proposals to amend Appendices I and II: Most of the respondents indicated that the preparations of proposals to amend Appendices I and II were moderately impacted, and that the COVID-19 pandemic made it somewhat more difficult to prepare amendment proposals because of reduced resources, staff being on sick leave, limited engagements with experts and other stakeholders and impacts on coordination mechanisms. More than 50 proposals to amend the Appendices I and II were submitted for consideration by the 19th meeting of the Conference of Parties (CoP19) which is in line with the average number submitted over the last six meetings of the Conference of the Parties.
- The World Trade Statistical Review 2021 (World Trade Organization, 2021) reported that the COVID-19 pandemic led to merchandise trade declining by 8 percent in 2020. The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on goods and services differed, with services declining by 30 per cent in the second quarter of 2020 compared with a fall of 23 percent for goods in the same period. The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on international trade in specimens of CITES-listed species will only be known when the Parties' annual reports for 2020 and 2021 are submitted, and based on the responses above, delays in the submission of annual reports should be anticipated. At the time of writing this document, 137 annual reports for 2020 were received, of which 32 were submitted in 2022 (number of reports for previous years: 2019 – 160; 2018 – 167 and 2017 – 168). The possible impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on international trade transactions involving CITES-listed species in 2020 and 2021 could be better understood if a comparative analysis is done to determine if there were any changes.

## II. Highlights from the Secretariat – 2021

March – Fourteenth United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice: Kyoto, Japan, 7-12 March 2021

At this landmark congress, the Secretary-General spoke of the need for further and strengthened international collaboration and coordination in the fight against wildlife crime. Ms. Higuero said, “The same enforcement tools, techniques and penalties used to combat other serious crimes, such as trafficking in drugs or persons, must be deployed against the illegal trade in wildlife. We are living with the terrible impacts of this pandemic in every sphere of our lives; and it has placed a renewed spotlight on the state of our relationship with the planet, highlighting the need to urgently address our unsustainable interactions with nature. This includes, of course, addressing the menace that is wildlife crime.”



The Congress gave rise to the Kyoto Declaration, welcomed by the Secretariat, which specifically addresses the need to adopt effective measures to “prevent and combat crimes that affect the environment, such as illicit trafficking in wildlife, including, *inter alia*, flora and fauna as protected by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora.”

The Declaration emphasizes the importance of making the best possible use of relevant international instruments and of strengthening legislation, international cooperation, criminal justice responses and law enforcement efforts aimed at dealing with transnational organized crime, corruption and money-laundering linked to such crimes, and illicit financial flows derived from such crimes. The Declaration further acknowledges the need to deprive criminals of proceeds of crime and to strengthen capacity among relevant agencies and personnel in order to combat wildlife crime.

The work of CITES Parties shows that regulating the trade in and use of wildlife can benefit people, planet and prosperity, by conserving wild species while preserving the livelihoods of communities who rely on them.

However, this work can be seriously undermined by wildlife crime. The scale and nature of such crime has changed: today, we see significant involvement of transnational criminal groups driving industrial-scale illegal operations. This often involves thousands of animals and plants, as evidenced by large seizures amounting to several tons.

Wildlife crime has serious economic, social and environmental impacts. It decimates wildlife populations and destroys habitats. It also degrades ecosystems and increases the risk that new zoonotic diseases might emerge.



The landmark Congress was conducted under the theme of Advancing crime prevention, criminal justice and the rule of law: towards the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. Ultimately, wildlife crime hinders progress toward the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Without thriving wildlife, Sustainable Development Goals 14 (On Life Below water) and 15 (On Life on Land) clearly cannot be achieved. However, we should consider that goals 1 (No Poverty) or 12 (Sustainable consumption and production) are also affected by the loss of wildlife.

The need to address wildlife crime as a serious, transnational organized crime is evident. No country or region can fight it alone. Further and strengthened international collaboration and coordination are essential. The same enforcement tools, techniques and penalties used to combat other serious crimes, such as trafficking in drugs or persons, must be deployed against wildlife crime.

#### March – ETIS data reveals record weights of ivory seizures



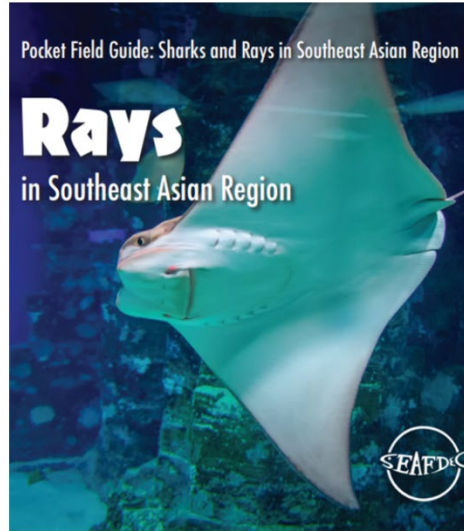
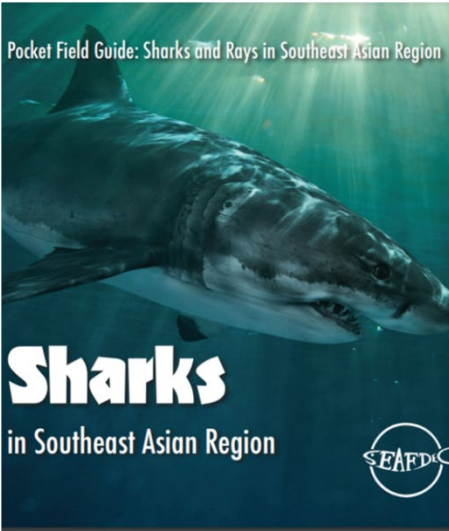
March saw the release of pre-pandemic data that showed record weights of ivory seizures. The Elephant Trade Information System (ETIS) data indicated that, despite reporting gaps, there was a marked increase in the total weight of ivory seized during 2019 compared to the previous three years. The year 2019 saw three of the largest weight seizures ever recorded by the monitoring system. It is thought the seizures are a result of the coordinated actions taken by enforcement agencies to combat this illegal trade. ETIS is part of the MIKE project which monitors the illegal killing of elephants in nearly 50 range states across Africa and Asia.

The report is based on almost 28,000 records of elephant specimen seizures reported to ETIS from 1989 to 2019. Compared to the ETIS report to the 18th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (Geneva, 2019), this latest report incorporates additional data submitted to ETIS in 2018 and 2019.

However, data gaps remain a significant challenge for analysing trends in illegal ivory trade and for the interpretation of ETIS data: of the 45 countries that have regularly submitted data to ETIS since 2013, 23 countries had not yet submitted data for 2018, 2019, or both years, before the closing date of the analysis.

#### April - New guide to help the identification of shark and ray species in Southeast Asia published

The CITES Secretariat and the Secretariat of the Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC) jointly published two guides to facilitate the identification of shark and ray species common in the Southeast Asian region. The purpose of the guides is to provide an accessible tool to help fisheries officers, fisheries researchers, CITES authorities and other relevant stakeholders in identifying sharks and rays in the Southeast Asian region.



The guides, collectively named the *Pocket Field Guide: sharks and rays in Southeast Asian region*, contain photographs and summary descriptions of the most commonly found 25 species of rays and 25 species of sharks and are available for download through this page:

[https://cites.org/eng/SEAFDEC\\_CITES\\_rays\\_sharks\\_pocket\\_field\\_guide](https://cites.org/eng/SEAFDEC_CITES_rays_sharks_pocket_field_guide)

The average sizes of each species, their scientific and common names, and their status under CITES and in the IUCN Red List are also included in the guides. Colour photographs and drawings are provided for each species with highlighted arrows on the main identifying characteristics. The images of "look-alike" species are arranged in the same page or the following adjacent pages for easy comparison.

#### May – First online meeting of the CITES Standing Committee

Over half of all CITES Parties and more than 100 observer organizations took part in the 73rd meeting of the CITES Standing Committee, on 5-7May, marking the first time a CITES governing body convened a formal meeting in an online format. Committee Members, Parties and observers discussed a broad selection of issues affecting the implementation of the Convention, that included:

- Revising the language strategy for the Convention to include Arabic, Russian and Chinese
- Strengthening cooperation with other biodiversity-related Conventions and particularly the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS)
- Engaging further with the elaboration of the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework
- The use of electronic permitting systems to monitor trade in CITES-listed species
- Endorsement of *Guidance on the Use of Simplified Procedures and Scientific Exchange Exemption*
- The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of the Convention and
- Species-specific matters with reports on tortoises, freshwater turtles and big cats

### May-June – First online meeting of the CITES Scientific Committees

Also, CITES' two scientific bodies held online meetings in May-June in order to move forward on their significant work programmes. It was the 31st meeting of the Animals Committee and the first time it had formally met online.

It was also the 25th meeting of the Plants Committee and in her opening remarks to this committee, the CITES Secretary-General noted that the first time the committee met, in November 1988, 31 people attended. This latest meeting had 417 representatives of 75 Parties and 106 representatives of 54 observer organizations.

For the two meetings (of both the AC and PC) held in 2021, there was a total of more than 600 delegates, representing 86 Parties to CITES and more than 250 representatives of over 100 observer organizations. This made these online meetings the most heavily attended in the history of the two committees.

The Animals Committee discussed issues related to lions, eels, vultures, marine turtles and sharks and rays, while Plants Committee Members deliberated on rosewoods, frankincense, orchids, and medicinal and aromatic plants, among others. The two committees agreed on a number of recommendations that will serve to inform the decision-making of the CITES Standing Committee and of all Parties ahead of the 19th meeting of the Conference of the Parties taking place in November 2022.

### June – Workshop on strategies for reducing demand for illegal wildlife products

The demand for illegal wildlife products is one of the leading causes for the decline of many species, including elephants, rhinoceroses, great apes, marine turtles, pangolins, and tigers, but also species of flora and fauna such as cycads, rosewoods, seahorses, tortoises, parrots, and ungulates.

Demand for illegally sourced wildlife is driven by several different factors. Some of these species are sought after as status symbols, out of curiosity, or for the novelty or as collectors' items. Others are purchased to be kept as exotic pets, or for food, medicine, furniture, or fashion.

The Secretariat, in collaboration with TRAFFIC, hosted a two-day online workshop to review the draft *CITES Guidance on demand reduction strategies for illegal wildlife trade* and to provide training in behaviour change techniques aimed at reducing demand for illegally sourced wildlife products among consumers. Representatives of 20 CITES Parties joined participants from civil society, the private sector and academia to share state-of-the-art knowledge and lessons learnt in this domain. The workshop delivered on [Decision 18.86](#) which called on the CITES Secretariat to develop guidance for demand reduction and submit for the Parties' review.

In her remarks opening the workshop, CITES Secretary-General Ivonne Higuero said: "Responding to illicit trafficking in wildlife and associated crimes requires deploying all possible efforts to enforce the law and ensuring that relevant agencies are able to detect and punish criminals involved in that trafficking. It also involves promoting demand reduction strategies in consuming countries and providing incentives to rural communities to conserve wildlife in countries rich in biodiversity. The development of the *CITES Guidance on demand reduction* is a

crucial response of CITES in order to support government-led and well-targeted strategies to achieve behavioural change."

### June – eCITES, electronic permitting to support Caribbean Parties efforts to improve Wildlife Trade Controls



The move to electronic permitting will deliver great benefits to Parties in ensuring that all international trade in CITES-listed species is legal, traceable and sustainable. On 15 June, the Secretariat of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the CITES Secretariat held an online workshop on eCITES permit management in support of the implementation of the Convention in the Caribbean region.

The workshop aimed to raise awareness of the potential benefits of automated permitting systems; the increased transparency and control they can bring to the supply chain; and the role they can play in the development of electronic risk management systems. CARICOM has 15 Member States that are also Parties to CITES and the Caribbean region is extremely biodiverse and home to numerous species that are listed in the CITES Appendices.

Delegates of nine CARICOM Member States attended the workshop, including representatives of CITES Management Authorities, customs, forestry, fisheries and environment agencies. They learned about efforts aimed at implementing systems for electronic permitting for CITES trade in other regions, and about the training, legislation and law enforcement efforts this entailed. They also discussed the status of the ASYCUDA projects in the Caribbean context, supported by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), and how these projects illustrated reforms efforts in the region to automate customs and trade procedures.

### July – UN General Assembly Resolution on tackling illicit trafficking in wildlife

On 23 July 2021, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted a Resolution on Tackling illicit trafficking in wildlife. This Resolution reaffirms and builds upon other Resolutions on this topic adopted by the UNGA in 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2019.

The Resolution recognizes the legal framework provided by CITES and its important role as the primary mechanism for regulating international trade in CITES listed species of fauna and flora. It further welcomes the relevant Resolutions and Decisions adopted at the 18th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES (CoP18) in August 2019.

The Resolution urges UN Member States to take decisive steps to prevent, combat and eradicate wildlife crime. It calls upon Member States to make illicit trafficking in protected wild fauna and flora a serious crime to ensure that, where the offense is transnational in nature and involves an organized criminal group, effective international cooperation can be afforded under the relevant international Conventions, such as the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime and the United Nations Convention Against Corruption.

### September – Formal agreement signed with Panama to host CITES CoP19

The Government of Panama and the CITES Secretariat signed the agreement formalizing Panama's offer to host the 19th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES (CoP19).



The CITES Secretary-General Ivonne Higuero signed on behalf of the Secretariat and His Excellency, Mr. Milciades Concepción, Panama's Environment Minister, signed the Host Country Agreement on behalf of the Panamanian government.

Consequently, it was agreed that CITES CoP19 will take place from 14 to 25 November 2022 in the Panama Convention Center, in the city of Panama. CoP19 will be preceded and followed by the 75th and 76th meetings of the CITES Standing

Committee.

### October – Andorra becomes latest Party to CITES



In October, the CITES Secretariat welcomed the Principality of Andorra as the newest Party to CITES. By submitting its instrument of accession to the Depositary Government of Switzerland, Andorran authorities confirmed their intention to join the Convention and subsequently became a Party with effect from 4 January 2022.

This brought the total number of Parties to CITES to 184 – 183 States and the European Union – with the Convention now one step closer to universal adoption by the 193 Member States of the United

Nations.

Andorra is a landlocked nation situated in the east of the Pyrenees Mountain range, bordered by France to the north and Spain to the south. Its capital is Andorra la Vella. It is home to some 38 species of animals listed in the CITES Appendices including birds like the Eurasian goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*, App. II), mammals like the Eurasian otter (*Lutra lutra*, App. I) and insects like the Apollo butterfly (*Parnassius apollo*, App. II), together with a variety of plant species, including orchids. The country is primarily an importer and/or re-exporter of specimens of CITES-listed species, in particular caviar and leather and wood products.



## October – CITES workshop on the implementation of the Convention in Central America

On 12-14 October, the CITES Secretariat facilitated an online workshop to strengthen the implementation of the Convention in the region of Central America. The gathering was organized with the support of José Julián Suazo, regional CITES representative to the Standing Committee, and was hosted by the United States Department of the Interior's International Technical Assistance Programme (DOI ITAP).

Participants were provided with a thorough overview of CITES processes, covering national legislation to comply with the Convention; legal acquisition findings; introduction from the sea; exemptions & special provisions; and the submission of annual trade reports and reports on illegal trade.

Attendees also heard from the experiences of Mary Cogliano, Chair of the CITES Standing Committee working group on sharks and rays (Elasmobranchii spp.), and from representatives of Management Authorities from Chile, Peru, and Ecuador, who spoke about their countries' respective efforts to develop appropriate national legislation. There were a total of 106 participants from Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Panama, and the Dominican Republic.

## October – Online meeting to address illegal fishing of totoaba

The illegal fishing of totoaba (*Totoaba macdonaldi*), listed in CITES Appendix I, poses a severe threat to the survival of the vaquita (*Phocoena sinus*), which are caught as bycatch in the nets used by fishers operating illegally in the vaquita refuge area. The vaquita is also listed in CITES Appendix I and is a critically endangered porpoise endemic to the Upper Gulf of California.

On 18-20 and 22 October, the CITES Secretariat convened an online meeting which brought together representatives of range, transit and consumer States of the totoaba to strengthen efforts to halt illegal fishing of totoaba and the associated trafficking of its swim bladders. The meeting was attended by representatives from Canada, China, including the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of China, Japan, Mexico, the United States of America, and Viet Nam, as well as representatives from the International Consortium on Combatting Wildlife Crime (ICWC), partner organizations and other intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. The meeting was made possible thanks to financial support from Switzerland and had more than 100 participants.



The online meeting provided an opportunity for those attending to evaluate progress made in combating illegal fishing of totoaba; consider opportunities to eliminate supply and demand for illegally sourced specimens of totoaba; and strengthen law enforcement measures to prevent and address this illegal trade. Attendees agreed to pursue actions, strategies, measures and activities to strengthen



enforcement efforts, collaboration, coordination, and the flow of information between counterparts in different countries.

#### October – Online workshop on physical inspection of timber shipments in the Lower Mekong Region.

The Lower Mekong Region is home to around 100 CITES-listed tree species. These include CITES Appendix-II timber producing species of rosewoods (*Dalbergia* spp.), yew trees (*Taxus* spp.), and agarwood (*Aquilaria* spp.), some of which are highly valuable for international trade.



This has made some of these species a target for illegal logging and trafficking. Local enforcement authorities and customs agencies are in the front lines of the battle against wildlife crime. They must be equipped with the best knowledge and tools available to detect and deter trafficking, notably by performing inspections on suspicious shipments. From 25 to 29 October, the CITES Secretariat hosted an online workshop on physical inspection of timber shipments in the Lower Mekong Region.

The workshop brought together officials from CITES Management Authorities, customs, police, and other relevant administrations responsible for regulation and law enforcement related to CITES-listed tree species. It sought to enhance capacity among national authorities to conduct inspections of valuable timber shipments; correctly identify species; detect illegal consignments; conduct related investigations; and appropriately dispose of confiscated illegal consignments.

The workshop also provided a valuable opportunity for representatives from different authorities to discuss and exchange information on timber shipment inspection best practices and challenges. It contributed to the work of the CITES Secretariat related to the identification of timber and other wood products and was organized in the framework of the FAO-CITES Secretariat's agreement to support the implementation of the UN-REDD initiative for Sustainable Forest Trade in the Lower Mekong Region.

#### November – Online workshop on the implementation of CITES through national fisheries frameworks in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)

The waters of the Pacific Islands countries (PICs) are home to numerous aquatic species that are listed in the CITES Appendices, and which support livelihoods and economic opportunities for communities in over a dozen Parties to the Convention. The sustainable use of these species and the regulation of their trade is of paramount importance for their conservation.

To support national authorities of selected PICs in meeting their commitments under the Convention, the CITES Secretariat and FAO through the Development Law Service (LEGN) of the Legal Office, jointly organized a three-day subregional training workshop, which was held online from 15 to 17 November 2021. The FAO Subregional Office for the Pacific Islands (FAO SAP) and FAO Offices in the concerned countries also collaborated in the organization of the workshop. The objective of the workshop was to train representatives of national fisheries administrations, CITES Management and Scientific Authorities and other relevant institutions on strengthening cooperation between fisheries and CITES authorities for the effective implementation of CITES in the fisheries sector.

## November - Operation Thunder 2021

A worldwide enforcement operation against wildlife and timber crime coordinated by the World Customs Organization (WCO) and INTERPOL disrupted crime networks and saw hundreds of arrests worldwide.

Codenamed Thunder 2021, the month-long (1-31 October) operation involved customs, police, financial intelligence units and wildlife and forestry enforcement agencies in 118 countries, the largest number of participating countries since the inception of the “Thunder” operation series in 2017. Thousands of cars, trucks, boats and cargo transporters suspected of transporting protected wildlife and timber were searched, often with specialist sniffer dogs and X-ray scanners. Searches targeted illegally traded CITES-listed specimens, ranging from timber to live big cats, primates, reptiles, and birds, as well as derivative products such as clothing, beauty products, food items, traditional medicines and handicrafts.

Operation Thunder 2021 saw more than 1,000 seizures and the identification of some 300 suspects, triggering a series of worldwide arrests and investigations linked to illegal trading, processing, exporting and importing CITES-listed wildlife and forestry products. Further arrests and prosecutions are foreseen globally as investigations continue to unfold.

Total worldwide seizures reported included:

- 478 kg of ivory and 487 kg of ivory-derived products
  - 75 big cat parts, 29 live big cats
  - 856 kg pangolin scales
  - 531 turtles and tortoises
  - 171 birds
  - 336 reptiles
  - 4,843 kg marine products, including corals
  - 75,320 kg of timber, including 313m<sup>3</sup> of rosewood
  - 1.4 million plant-derived items
- 
- On the Mozambican border, South African authorities seized 460 kg of abalone bound for China. Abalone mollusks are at critically low levels because of overexploitation
  - Myanmar authorities made 13 seizures nationwide totaling 68 tons of restricted and endangered hardwood species
  - Polish authorities intercepted 29 illegal caviar shipments; international trade in caviar from all species of sturgeons is covered by the Convention
  - In one of the operation’s largest plant-based seizures, the UK’s Border Force in Felixstowe seized from a maritime container 1.3 million tablets containing the plant *Saussurea costus*, listed in Appendix I of the Convention
  - Spain’s Guardia Civil seized over 250 items regulated by the Convention, including turtles, parrots, ivory-based merchandise and timber.
  - Authorities in the Netherlands intercepted 145 snakes and other reptiles in luggage at Schiphol International Airport, as well as 454 live birds, mostly African songbirds.

## November – Wildlife Inter-Regional Enforcement (WIRE) Forum 2021

CITES Secretary-General, Ivonne Higuero, gave the keynote speech to an audience of law enforcement and justice officials from Africa, Asia and Oceania. She said *inter alia* that “The spirit of collaboration embodied in the Wildlife Inter-Regional Enforcement initiative is precisely what we need to strengthen our collective resolve in the struggle against wildlife crime. This forum provides a wonderful opportunity to discuss your excellent work to enhance cooperation along the entire criminal justice chain. And to further strengthen and expand this collaboration.”

She also paid tribute to the collaboration and cross-border efforts involving 20 countries and territories across Asia as part of Operation Mekong Dragon which led to a number of significant seizures of illegal wildlife products.

“Wildlife trafficking concerns us all. We must continue to facilitate all forms of cooperation that make it possible for all relevant actors to efficiently work together towards our common goal.”

Over the decades, CITES Parties have worked to adapt the Convention in response to the trafficking of CITES-listed species. Governments have shown their resolve at successive meetings of the Conference of the Parties to CITES, where their Decisions have guided the Convention to take an even more significant role in responding to illegal trade and trafficking. CITES is known for its robust compliance procedures. These aim to ensure that the requirements of the Convention are met by all.

Ms. Higuero pointed out that national laws must be in place to ensure that CITES is implemented at a national level, “Parties must make clear that trade in violation of CITES rules is defined as illegal under national laws and associated with adequate penalties. They must also ensure that such laws are enforced, that criminals are justly prosecuted and sentenced, and that illegally obtained specimens are confiscated.”

“We must all persevere in our efforts to address wildlife crime. Criminals continue to adapt and exploit every possible avenue to expand their illicit business. This means that enforcement actors and relevant agencies must adapt and refine their strategies to respond to new trends and developments. We very much acknowledge that this is hard work and congratulate you for these efforts.”

### III. Highlights from the Secretariat – 2020

In early 2020, the Secretariat was preparing to organize several major meetings in fulfillment of its mandate to service Parties and support their implementation of the Convention. These were the 31st meeting of the Animals Committee, the 25th meeting of the Plants Committee, and the 73rd meeting of the Standing Committee, all originally scheduled to take place in person in July and October.

However, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, Parties, the Committee Chairs and the Secretariat concluded that face-to-face meetings were not possible. Since the cancellation or postponement of Committee meetings was not within the collective experience of the Secretariat or Committee Members, the Secretariat developed three scenarios which were discussed at a first-ever online discussion amongst Standing Committee Members which took place on 1 July 2020. Thirteen out of sixteen Committee Members joined the meeting to review three meeting organization scenarios and their respective conservation-related, pandemic-related and financial risks and the risks to fair, inclusive and equitable decision-making posed by each.

On 14 July 2020, the Standing Committee advised the Secretariat to cancel the meeting that was foreseen to be held in Geneva from 5 to 9 October 2020 and review the work given to the Committee by the CoP so that it could be delivered to the greatest extent possible. Most preparatory work for the accomplishment of tasks mandated to the Standing Committee by the Conference of the Parties was undertaken by the Animals Committee, the Plants Committee or the Secretariat in accordance with the instructions from the Conference of the Parties. Some issues were taken forward by intersessional working groups established by the Standing Committee at its 72nd meeting.

Furthermore, the Standing Committee, Animals Committee and Plants Committee established a total of 32 intersessional working groups to advance their work and the terms of reference and memberships of these groups were kept up to date on the CITES website. Throughout the year, the Secretariat maintained a telephone switchboard and email address for general enquiries, receiving over 3,000 emails and around 500 phone calls, and issuing 82 Notifications to the Parties.

#### Online meetings and workshops

Despite the restrictions and logistical hurdles posed by measures meant to curb the spread of COVID-19, Secretariat staff worked to adapt and continue to meet their commitments to Parties and their representatives.

Staff from all units thus transitioned to hold meetings online and make them accessible to Parties from all regions so that common work could continue despite the challenging circumstances. As a result, 2020 was marked by a series of online meetings, webinars and workshops that ensured the Secretariat was able to cover as much ground as possible and ensured a continuity in services.



For example, in July 2020, the Secretariat organized an online meeting on CITES national legislation for selected CITES Parties in West Asia with the support of the United Nations Environment Programme. The meeting brought together representatives of the CITES Management Authorities of Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman and of the Syrian Arab Republic, to discuss the

challenges faced by Parties in adopting adequate national legislation and in implementing the Convention.

Discussions focused on the CITES minimum requirements to national legislation; challenges and opportunities related to e-permitting; non-detriment findings and species identification; and the needs for technical assistance and capacity-building in these areas. This meeting was then followed by a workshop with Parties from West Asia in November.

Though fraught with its own inherent difficulties, online meetings made it possible to reach wider and often new audiences that might not have been necessarily able to attend in-person gatherings. For the Secretariat, these benefits were most visible during a joint online workshop on modern customs procedures for improved control of trade in CITES-listed species, co-organized with the World Customs Organization in December.

Funded by the European Union, the workshop brought together some 200 representatives of the CITES Management Authorities and customs administrations from more than 30 countries, including representatives of the CITES Standing Committee working group on electronic permitting and information technology, as well as selected resource persons of UN agencies, the private sector and academia. Participants discussed ways to improve the implementation of efficient and risk-based procedures for control of CITES-listed species, including through the automation of CITES permitting processes, and to identify possible gaps in relevant CITES Resolutions, in particular from the point of view of adapting the CITES permitting process to match the current range of trading practices. The results and recommendations of the workshop were discussed by the Standing Committee working group on electronic systems and information technology.

#### Enhanced online presence of the Convention and the Secretariat

In October, the Secretariat launched a fully revamped version of the [cites.org](https://cites.org) website. The update sought to facilitate access to the wealth of documents and other specialized resources that Parties and other interested stakeholders expect the Secretariat to provide.

Notable features included increased responsiveness of the website design, a more intuitive layout as well as a dark mode to improve user experience, and an improved search function. The revamp was accompanied by the addition of entirely new pages to cover major issues, including compliance, introduction from the sea and appropriate and acceptable destinations.

The Secretariat also cooperated with TRAFFIC on the launch of a new online platform to bolster the collection of data by Parties on seizures involving elephants through the Elephant Trade

Information System (ETIS). The new platform, launched in October 2020, was dubbed ETIS online.

Another major change to the website was the addition of country profiles, a page that serves to compile all information related to implementation and compliance by each Party to the Convention. This feature was developed thanks to the financial support of the European Union.

Finally, so that all content on the CITES website remained up to date and accessible to all, the Secretariat translated approximately 380,000 words' worth of documents into both French and Spanish.

The Secretariat also responded to a number of requests involving posting data on the CITES website, including the following:

- Posting of some 7,000 export quotas for specimens of CITES species established by Parties during the year
- 97 requests from Parties and non-Parties who asked that contact details for Management Authorities, Scientific Authorities and enforcement focal points be updated on the CITES website
- 40 requests from scientific institutions entitled to the exemption provided by Article VII, paragraph 6 were added their corresponding register
- 7 operations were added to the register of captive-breeding operations that breed Appendix-I animal species for commercial purposes and
- 1 operation that artificially propagates specimens of Appendix-I plant species for commercial purposes was added to that register

#### April – New identification materials available online

4,000 species identification resources were added to the two online platforms of the *Checklist of CITES Species* and *Species+* in order to grant interested Parties an easier access to the materials for inspection and download.

Accurately identifying species remains a major challenge for enforcement and other agencies when carrying out duties linked to the implementation of the Convention, and access to such resources is a key tool to support the work of actors across all CITES processes.

These newly available identification tools were made available with the support of the UN Environment Programme-World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC), in an effort that was made possible thanks to the financial support from the European Union.



## July – World Wildlife Crime Report 2020

The World Wildlife Crime Report was launched and authored by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and unveiled in July. This report contains detailed case studies on illegally traded species; illicit markets and trade flows; as well as illicit financial flows. It focused on several species listed in the CITES Appendices and was developed drawing upon the best available data provided by international bodies and enforcement authorities from around the world.

This included data from the annual illegal trade reports that CITES Parties submit to the Secretariat since 2017. Parties have agreed that this data be shared with the members of the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICWC) for the purposes of research and analysis on wildlife and forest crime.

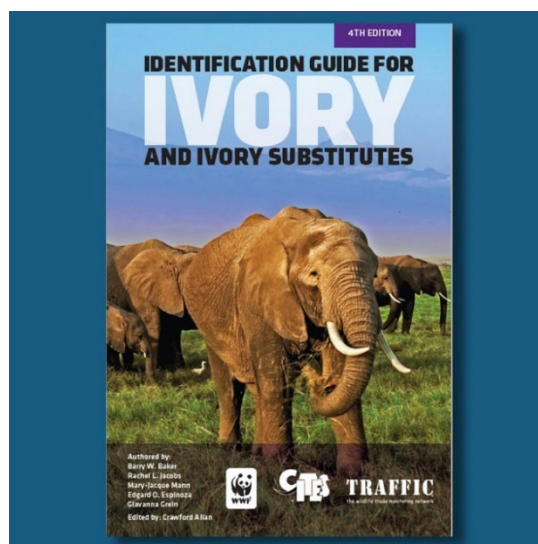


## August – Identification Guide for Ivory and Ivory Substitutes (revision)

Released in August, the *Identification Guide for Ivory and Ivory Substitutes* is the fourth edition of a publication that had last been reviewed in 1999, and which is intended help law enforcement agencies distinguish between types of ivories and their substitutes.

This latest edition was produced with the support of the World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF) and TRAFFIC.

This new version was launched in August 2020 and was made available to Parties' customs and law enforcement agencies, with versions in English, Chinese, French and Spanish. This publication was made possible with funding from the European Union.



## September – FAO/CITES sourcebook for marine species and fisheries:

In collaboration with the Secretariat, the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO) published a sourcebook to support the implementation of CITES in the fisheries context, with a focus on national fisheries legislation and related legal matters.

Titled *Implementing the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) through national fisheries legal frameworks: a study and a guide*, the sourcebook contains a comprehensive study explaining the relevant aspects of CITES

implementation in the fisheries sector and a guide to be used by legal practitioners and decision-makers wishing to review and enhance their fisheries legislation in line with CITES requirements.

The sourcebook was developed as part of the FAO-CITES collaboration, funded by the European Union, and produced by the Development Law Service of FAO's Legal Office, together with FAO's Fisheries and Aquaculture Department and the CITES Secretariat.

### October – Joint statements on responses to the pandemic

Multiple Secretariat teams were involved in the formulation and launch of two significant statements relating to COVID-19, on behalf of two large partnerships involving major international and non-governmental organizations. These were the Cooperative Partnership on Forests' call for forest solutions to be placed at the heart of COVID-19 recovery strategies and the Collaborative Partnership on Sustainable Wildlife Management's call for a science-based approach to wildlife management in the context of COVID-19.

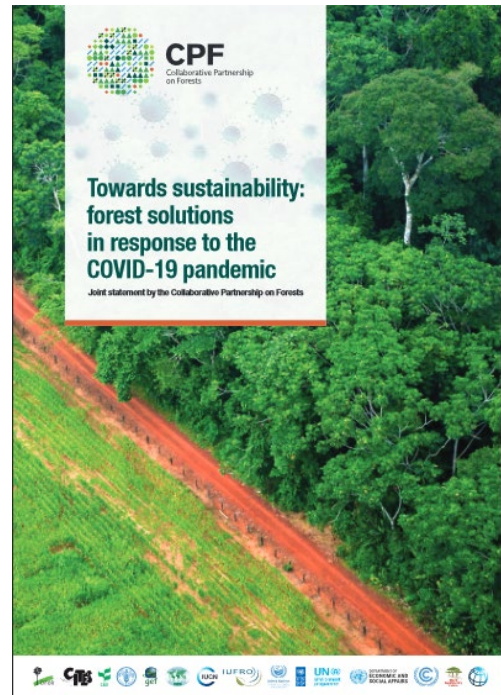
In the former, the fourteen members of the Cooperative Partnership on Forests (CPF) urged decision-makers to ensure that recovery plans do not reverse hard-won progress towards conserving forests, reducing and reversing forest loss and degradation and boosting sustainable production and trade in agricultural and forest products.

In the latter, the fourteen partners involved in the Collaborative Partnership on Sustainable Wildlife Management (CPW) put forward four guiding principles to inspire actions that would work to reduce the risks of the rise and spread of new zoonotic diseases, while also contributing to the conservation of species and ecosystems, and the preservation of the livelihoods of the diverse groups that rely on wildlife for their incomes and sustenance.

### October – The Blue BioTrade project

The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) and the Secretariat launched a regional project titled *Seizing the trade and business potential of Blue BioTrade products for promoting sustainable livelihoods and conservation of marine diversity in selected OECS countries (Blue BioTrade project)*.

The project is aiming to empower small scale coastal operators from Grenada, Saint Lucia and St. Vincent and the Grenadines to produce and trade queen conch products in domestic, regional and international markets under the Blue BioTrade environmental, social and economic sustainability criteria.



Queen conch (*Strombus gigas*, CITES App. II) is a sea mollusc or shellfish with a storied history in the context of CITES. It was included in the CITES Appendices in November 1992 and remains one of the most important fishery resources in the Wider Caribbean Region.

## IV. Programmes and projects led by the Secretariat

### World Wildlife Day

In March 2013, during the 16th meeting of the Conference of the Parties, and coinciding with the 40th anniversary of the Convention, Parties passed a resolution inviting all Parties and the United Nations General Assembly to consider declaring 3 March, the date on which CITES was signed in 1973, as **World Wildlife Day**.



**WORLD  
WILDLIFE DAY**  
3 MARCH

On 20 December 2013, at its 68th session, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) accepted this proposal and declared 3 March World Wildlife Day, an annual observance that would be used to celebrate and raise awareness of the world's wild animals and plants.

The UNGA resolution designated the CITES Secretariat as the principal facilitator for the global observance of this special day for wildlife on the UN calendar. World Wildlife Day has now become one of the most important global annual events dedicated to wildlife.

Each year, WWD is held along a principal theme, celebrating a particular species, a group of species or a singular aspect of our relationship with wildlife.

### World Wildlife Day – 2021



The 2021 theme of **Forests and Livelihoods: Sustaining People and Planet** highlighted the central role of forests, forest species and ecosystems services in sustaining the livelihoods of hundreds of millions of people globally, and particularly of indigenous and local communities with historic ties to forested and forest-adjacent areas. This aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals 1, 12, 13 and 15, and their wide-ranging commitments to alleviating

poverty; ensuring sustainable use of resources; and conserving life & land.

Given the continued COVID-19 pandemic in March 2021, the international celebration of the Day was held entirely online and streamed on YouTube, where it can still be watched: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xnzfseoxfv8>.



The event was co-organized and co-hosted with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). In her opening remarks, the Secretary-General of CITES underlined the importance of this year's celebration, with its focus on the communities that rely on forests and their wildlife and who have historically acted as their primary custodians. She said the aim of the event was to give a voice to these important stakeholders by sharing their forest conservation knowledge and experiences to inspire the establishment of truly sustainable models of interaction with the planet's ecosystems and wildlife. Ms. Fawn Sharp, President of the Quinault Indian Nation and President of the National Congress of American Indians, spoke of the efforts of indigenous peoples and local communities to preserve the knowledge that has sustained them for millennia. Mr. António Guterres, United Nations Secretary-General, expressed a heartfelt plea to governments, businesses and people everywhere to scale up efforts to conserve forests and forest species, and to support and listen to the voices of forest communities. He called this an urgent step towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Two panel discussions brought together experts from around the world. The first panel explored the role of the livelihoods of indigenous peoples and local communities in the conservation and sustainable use of forests. The second panel looked at the opportunities for inclusive and sustainable economic growth and employment through the sustainable use of forests.

For the sixth year running, Jackson Wild™, the CITES Secretariat and UNDP teamed up for the film showcase based on the theme. The contest attracted nearly 300 entries which brought to life a wide array of compelling stories about the work of communities involved in conserving forests and sustaining themselves through the essential ecosystem services provided by forests and wildlife. In addition to high-level events, the Secretariat continued to further mobilize countries and people around the world to embrace and celebrate World Wildlife Day. Countries in all continents celebrated World Wildlife Day 2021 in the form of conferences, street parades, television talk shows, street banners, brochures, exhibitions, competitions, massive social media campaigns as well as education programmes.

## World Wildlife Day – 2020

In 2020, the theme of World Wildlife Day was ***Sustaining All Life on Earth*** to raise awareness



to the state of the world's biological diversity ahead of what then been dubbed the "biodiversity super year".

The CITES Secretariat partnered with the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and other UN system organizations, Member States, and civil society to highlight the unique place of wild fauna and flora as essential

components of the world's biodiversity.

On 3 March, the annual celebration was marked by a high-level event at UN Headquarters in New York attended by representatives from Member States, biodiversity-related conventions and UN system organizations, civil society and the private sector.

As part of the 2020 World Wildlife Day activities, the Secretariat and UNDP partnered with Jackson Wild to organize a Film Showcase focusing on wildlife and biodiversity, which saw talented filmmakers submit 345 entries in eight categories.

For the second year in a row, the Secretariat and UNDP teamed up with the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) to organize a youth art contest inviting school-age children and young artists to illustrate the year's theme through their art. The contest attracted 200 entries from over 20 countries. The winning entry was that of Tiarn Garland, from Australia. Her work, titled "*Here today....but tomorrow?*" (pictured) was a poignant rendition of a koala in the midst of the devastating Australian bushfires, just as the country recovered from a tragic and intense fire season in late 2019.



Beyond the formal events directly managed by the Secretariat, World Wildlife Day was celebrated by governments, civil society groups and individuals around the world, with activities in classrooms, cinemas, street gatherings, art and photography exhibitions in countries everywhere, and with millions more amplifying the message on social media.

## The International Consortium on Combatting Wildlife Crime (ICCWC)

The International Consortium on Combatting Wildlife Crime (ICCWC) is the collaborative effort of five intergovernmental organizations working to bring coordinated support to national wildlife law enforcement agencies and to subregional and regional networks that, on a daily basis, act in defense of natural resources.





The partner agencies to ICCWC are the CITES Secretariat, INTERPOL, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the World Bank and the World Customs Organization (WCO).

Through their respective country or regional offices and bureaus, ICCWC partner agencies have access to an extensive global network that allows the Consortium to provide targeted support to national law enforcement agencies. In addition, ICCWC partner agencies offer state-of-the-art globally mandated databases and secure communication channels, designed for use by law enforcement agencies.

The Consortium is supported financially by the European Union, France, Germany, Monaco, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America.



In November 2020, partner agencies marked 10 years since the establishment of ICCWC through a communications campaign aimed at highlighting ten areas of work where the Consortium supported Parties and their national agencies in obtaining a variety of outcomes:

- Increase in awareness of the scale and seriousness of wildlife and forest crime
- Analysis of criminal justice responses to wildlife and forest crime
- Global intelligence-led operations disrupting and dismantling organized criminal groups
- Implementation of anti-corruption measures to minimize the risk of corrupt practices
- Strengthened cooperation between law enforcement authorities around the globe
- Practical tools to support the enforcement and prosecution of wildlife crimes
- Capacity-building and training resulting in enhanced skills of front-line wildlife crime investigators
- Deployment of specialized teams to support national authorities
- Specialized task forces formulating strategies and strengthening collaboration to address wildlife crime
- Technical assistance to detect and prosecute wildlife crime related money laundering

Since its establishment in 2010, the important role of ICCWC has been widely recognized. The number of activities being delivered under the auspices of ICCWC continues to expand in response to a growing list of requests from countries.

Building on the successes and lessons learned to date, ICCWC has developed the *ICCWC Vision 2030*, which will guide the work of the Consortium in the decade to come as it continues to support the actions of Parties in their fight against wildlife crime.

The Consortium published its own 2020 annual report, expanding on the details above and providing a broader overview of its activities throughout that year.

## Monitoring the Illegal Killing of Elephants programme (MIKE)

The CITES Monitoring the Illegal Killing of Elephants (MIKE) Programme is a site-based system designed to monitor trends in the illegal killing of elephants; build management capacity; provide information to help range States make appropriate management and enforcement decisions; and build institutional capacity within the range States for the long-term management of their elephant populations.



The programme is entirely dependent on donor support. The European Union (EU) has been the most important donor for the MIKE programme and has funded implementation in Africa since its inception in 2001, and in Asia from 2017 to 2021.

Funding has also been provided by China, Japan, Germany, the United States of America, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

In 2019, the MIKE programme successfully concluded the European Union (EU) funded Minimizing the Illegal Killing of Endangered Species (MIKES) project and initiated the implementation of the MIKES+ project in 2020, in addition to the Cross Regional Wildlife Conservation Project in eastern and southern Africa that started in 2019; both projects are funded by the European Union.

These projects support wildlife law enforcement and capacity-building in 15 focal sites across Africa. Activities supported include the provision of basic field equipment for rangers, boats and 4x4 vehicles to support ranger deployments, training and the construction of outposts and park operations centers.

Highlights include the creation of Zambia's first all-female patrol squad in Lower Zambezi National Park; construction of ranger outposts in Queen Elizabeth National Park, Uganda; and operation control rooms in Tai National Park, Côte d'Ivoire. In Okapi Wildlife Reserve, the project has supported the recruitment of ecoguards increasing the area's patrol staff by 25%. Work is ongoing to expand the number of sites supported in Central and West Africa.



Photo credit: Conservation Lower Zambezi

2020 was last year of implementation of the EU-funded project providing support to Asian elephant range States. Despite challenges posed by COVID-19, MIKE sites were provided with online support, basic equipment and an online human-elephant conflict webinar series for South Asia took place. Funding from the United States' Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) was secured for southeast Asia to support MIKE and enforcement related activities in the range States.

The CITES Secretariat released a [MIKE report on the PIKE trend analysis in 2020](#). This report included the new methodology for the PIKE analysis that was recommended by the MIKE-ETIS Technical Advisory Group after a review of the previous methodology. Based on the new methodology the PIKE trend in Africa decreased from 2011 to 2019, while it remained stable in Asia.

Staffed by the Secretariat, the MIKE Central Coordination Unit (MIKE CCU) collaborated with the UN Environment Programme, Science Division, to develop the MIKE Online Database, which, by the end of 2020, included more than 22,000 records submitted by elephant range States. The dashboard provides real-time feedback to partner wildlife management agencies on the spatial and temporal trends and levels of elephant mortality.

November 2021 – The CITES programme for Monitoring the Illegal Killing of Elephants (MIKE) has published its annual analysis of continental and subregional trends in the levels of elephant poaching, derived from data collected in 95 MIKE sites across 43 elephant range States in Africa and Asia.

Using data gathered by ranger patrols, the MIKE programme monitors trends in poaching levels based on the Proportion of Illegally Killed Elephants (PIKE) index. This is calculated on an annual basis as the number of illegally killed elephants found divided by the total number of elephant carcasses found, which includes elephants illegally killed, elephants that died of natural causes, management-related deaths, and carcasses for which the cause of death could not be established.

PIKE is an index of elephant poaching pressure. It may be affected by potential biases related to data quality, the fact that MIKE sites are not randomly selected, the reporting rate, carcass detection probabilities, and the variation in natural mortality rates across MIKE sites - including increases in natural mortality caused by drought and other factors.

The overall 2020 PIKE estimate for Africa is the lowest since 2003. Strong evidence points to continued downward trends in subregional analyses of data from MIKE sites in central, eastern, and southern Africa, while there is marginal evidence of a downward trend for sites in west Africa. The dataset used for this latest PIKE trend analysis for Africa consists of 22,015 records of African elephant carcasses recorded between 2003 and the end of 2020 at 66 MIKE sites in 30 range States in Africa.

The number of reporting MIKE sites increased from 58 in 2019 to 62 in 2020: data was submitted from 12 of 16 MIKE sites in central Africa, 14 of 16 sites in eastern Africa, 18 of 19 sites in southern Africa, and from all 18 sites in west Africa.

## The CITES Tree Species Programme (CTSP)

The CITES Tree Species Programme aims to provide direct financial assistance to Parties in taking conservation and management measures to ensure that their trade in timber, bark, extracts and other products from CITES-listed tree species is sustainable, legal and traceable. There are currently over 900 species of commercially valuable trees listed in the CITES Appendices.

In 2017, the CITES Secretariat and the European Union (EU) announced their collaboration in a project for the sustainable management of CITES-listed tree species, which the European Union funded, earmarking a sum of EUR 7 million to support what would become the CTSP Programme.

The CITES Tree Species Programme was tasked with selecting and providing financial support to 20 projects working towards the conservation and management of eight CITES-listed tree species and two genera, including rosewood species from Central and South America and the Caribbean. In total, the geographic scope of the CTSP involves 22 countries – 4 in Asia, 12 in Africa, and 6 in Central and South America and the Caribbean.

CTSP activities, and particularly its projects that involved fieldwork or in-person technical and consultation meetings and workshops were impacted by the restrictions put in place around the world as a result of the pandemic. Many of these planned activities were delayed because of these measures.

In April 2021, the CTSP was extended for another 18 months to allow more time for completion of the projects. An online advisory board meeting took place in July 2021, which provided an opportunity to review progress made in the implementation of the projects. The first project results were produced and uploaded to the dedicated CITES Tree Species Programme website:



[www.cites-tsp.org](http://www.cites-tsp.org). Three new projects were initiated, in Benin/Togo, Brazil and Ecuador (the latter financed directly by ITTO). Progress was also reported to the online meeting of the Plants Committee in document PC25 Doc. 8 and its addendum.

## V. What is CITES?

### What is CITES?

CITES (the **C**onvention on **I**nternational **T**rade in **E**ndangered **S**pecies of Wild Fauna and Flora) is an international agreement between governments that aims to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival, and that trade stays legal, sustainable and traceable.

CITES was drafted as a result of a resolution adopted in 1963 at a meeting of members of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). The text of the Convention was agreed at a meeting of representatives of 80 countries in Washington, D.C., United States of America, on 3 March 1973, and on 1 July 1975 CITES entered in force.

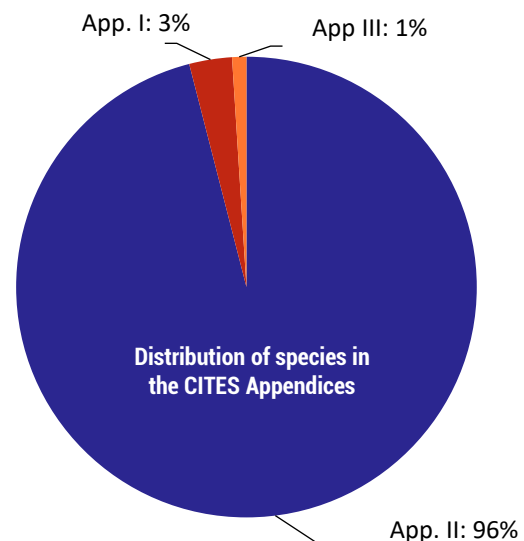
The Convention regulates trade in over 38,000 species of wild fauna and flora and is nowadays implemented and enforced by 184 Parties (183 States and the European Union). This makes it one of the oldest and most widely adopted treaties on species conservation in the world.

CITES works by subjecting international trade in species listed in three different Appendices to certain controls.

All imports, exports, re-exports and introductions from the sea of species listed in the CITES Appendices must be authorized through a permitting system. This system is overseen by national Management Authorities, which are advised by Scientific Authorities, both of which are appointed by each Party as part of the requirements of the Convention.

Parties decide on the inclusion in or removal of species from Appendices I and II or the increase or decrease in the level of protection for species which are already included.

Generally speaking, trade in species listed in Appendix I is prohibited, while trade in species listed in Appendix II is permitted but controlled. The vast majority of species listed in the CITES Appendices are present in Appendix II.



### The Secretariat and the Convention's governing bodies and scientific advisory committees

Parties are the beating heart of the CITES Convention and play a crucial role in the Convention's principal organs: the Conference of the Parties and the three committees that it has established: the Standing Committee, the Animals Committee and the Plants Committee.



The Standing Committee, the senior committee, provides policy guidance to the Secretariat concerning the implementation of the Convention and oversees the management of the Secretariat's budget. Beyond these key roles, it coordinates and oversees, where required, the work of the other committees and agreed working groups.

The Animals and Plants Committees are tasked with filling gaps in biological and other specialized knowledge regarding species of animals and plants that are or might become subject to CITES trade controls. They provide scientific advice and guidance directly to Parties, to the Conference of the Parties, the Standing Committee and the Secretariat; undertake periodic reviews of species; analyze the impact of trade on their populations and propose remedial action if needed.

The CITES Secretariat is the final piece of the puzzle: it is based in Geneva and is primarily tasked with servicing Parties and the Convention overall, playing a coordination and organizational role for both.

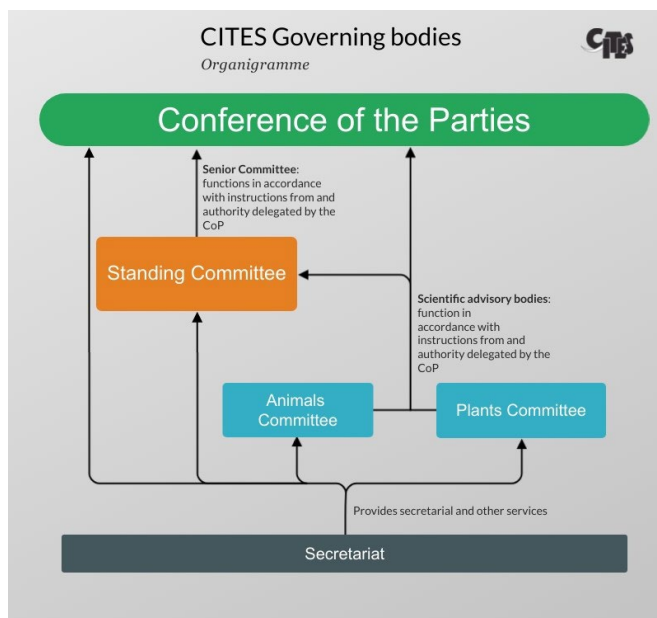
## CITES figures at a snapshot

- **Over 1,000,000 annual CITES transactions:** Management Authorities issue over a million permits for transactions involving species listed in the CITES Appendices every year. CITES Parties are required to produce annual reports of their trade transactions involving CITES species. These are publicly available in the [CITES Trade Database](#), which is managed by the UN Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC) on behalf of the CITES Secretariat, and it currently holds approximately 23 million records of trade in taxa listed in the CITES Appendices.
- **97% of CITES listed species can be traded legally for commercial purposes:** 96 % of CITES species are listed in Appendix II and 1% can be found in Appendix III.
- Most trade in CITES species as reported by Parties between 2015 and 2021 **involves specimens of flora**. Reptiles and birds follow but are at a distant second and third place. Trade in mammals takes up the 7th place in this ranking.
- **59% of CITES Parties have legislation that is deemed to meet all the requirements of the CITES Convention**, i.e. they have the legal tools in place to successfully implement the Convention. The Secretariat, Parties and the Conference of the Parties are working to support Governments that do not yet have these tools in place.

## VI. The CITES Secretariat in 2020 and 2021

### The role of the CITES Secretariat

The Convention is administered by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and is located in the International Environment House in Geneva, Switzerland. UNEP provides the Secretariat staff that services the Convention.



With a coordinating, advisory and servicing role in the working of the Convention, the Secretariat is the interface between Parties, the governing bodies and scientific advisory committees, civil society, the media and the public.

Its broad responsibilities include, among others, supporting and advising Parties on implementation, scientific and enforcement matters; distributing relevant information to Parties; facilitating all meetings of governing bodies and scientific advisory committees; acting as a repository of Parties' trade reports and data; and raising awareness among the media of the work and impact of the Convention.

In 2020, the CITES Secretariat had 37 staff members originating from over 20 countries. Among them, 31 are based in the Geneva duty station, while six are based in the UNEP headquarters in Gigiri (Nairobi), Kenya, for the implementation of the Monitoring the Illegal Killing of Elephants (MIKE) programme.

Article XII of the text of the Convention requires the CITES Secretariat to prepare annual reports to the Parties on its work and on the implementation of the Convention. This document, which covers the years 2020-2021, is the 43rd annual report of the Secretariat.

### Restructuring of the CITES Secretariat as of September 2020

As of September 2021, the Secretariat is divided into the following units:

- Office of the Secretary-General
- Administration and Finance Unit
- Enforcement Unit
- Governing Bodies Unit
- Legal Unit
- Outreach and Projects Unit
- Science Unit

This follows a restructuring of the Secretariat, led by Secretary-General Ivonne Higuero, in consultation with unit chiefs, Parties and external stakeholders. This is the first restructuring

of the Secretariat since 2010 and, though it was originally planned to take place in early 2020, it had to be postponed due to the effects of the pandemic on staff's work routines.

Secretary-General Ivonne Higuero explained the need for this restructuring citing the natural evolution and new developments in the work expected of both the Secretariat and of the Convention as a whole over the last decade.

She pointed to the increased volume of essential work needed before and after each meeting of the CITES governing bodies, and the imperative need to maintain strong relationships with CITES Management Authorities and continue to offer all necessary support to Parties in the ever-changing tasks related to implementing the Convention. These tasks, the Secretary-General thought, required the Secretariat to rethink its use of administrative, financial, and human resources.

**The Office of the Secretary-General:** this team supports the work of the CITES Secretary-General, Ms. Ivonne Higuero, in her role as head of the Secretariat and as the principal interlocutor of Parties, United Nations System organizations and other major partners.

**The Administration and Finance Unit:** this team is at the core of the administrative and financial activities of the CITES Secretariat. AFU's tasks include, but are not limited to, managing human resources and staff development and performance management; managing finances, including the CITES Trust Fund and its use for costed programmes; and overseeing essential logistics and procurement for all of the Secretariat's needs, including travel and the procurement of necessary supplies and equipment. AFU supports all the other teams in their implementation of the work programme of the Secretariat.

**The Enforcement Unit:** Though the Convention has always been primarily concerned with regulating *legal* international trade in wild species of fauna and flora, contributing to responses to the continued threat of illegal trade and wildlife trafficking is an important area of work, as is ensuring Parties have the means and knowledge to enforce all rules under CITES. These are the main areas of work of the Enforcement Unit, which represents the Secretariat in all efforts aimed at bolstering enforcement capacity among Parties and their relevant agencies, and in various international and interagency cooperation efforts that tackle illegal trade, trafficking and other forms of wildlife crime, such as the International Consortium on Combatting Wildlife Crime (ICWC, see dedicated chapter).

**The Governing Bodies Unit:** the core work of this team is to facilitate meetings of the statutory CITES committees and of the Conference of the Parties. The organization of a meeting of the Committees, and most importantly, that of a Conference of the Parties covers many aspects: online registration, distribution of documents, vetting of credentials, preparing the infrastructure at the venue, interpretation, organization of side-events, catering services, procurement and testing of audiovisual equipment and of a secure voting system, and more.

**The Legal Unit:** this team handles all work by the Secretariat which relates to the implementation of and compliance with the Convention by Parties and actors involved in the international trade in wild species of fauna and flora. This unit offers legal advice to inform decisions by Parties and the CITES governing bodies and scientific advisory committees that shape the regulations of trade under CITES. This includes matters related to national legislation or the annotations that accompany certain listings in the CITES Appendices.

**The Outreach and Projects Unit:** this team covers a wide set of responsibilities related the Secretariat's outreach, partnerships, communications and management of the two main programmes directly managed by the Secretariat: the **Monitoring the Illegal Killing of Elephants** Programme (MIKE) and the **CITES Tree Species Programme** (CTSP). Among others, the unit is tasked with managing the Secretariat's information and communications technology (ICT); liaising with partner organizations and donors; and maintaining the

Secretariat's online capacity-building tools, such as the CITES [Online Courses](#) and [Virtual College](#).

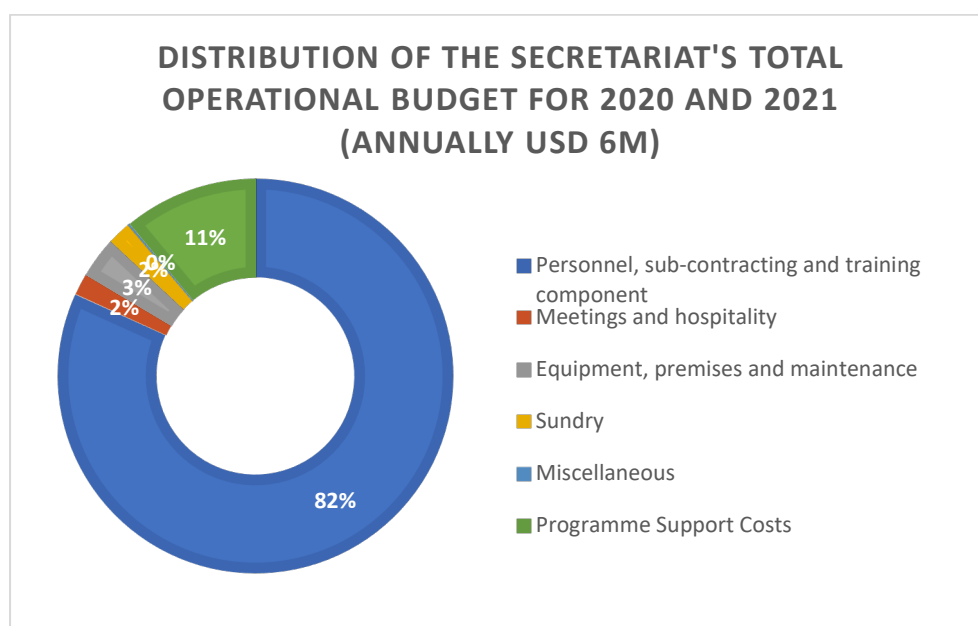
This unit also handles the communications work of the Secretariat, including web-content management and the production of content for external publication (press releases, news items, social media content), and they are also responsible for planning and organizing the annual **World Wildlife Day** celebrations (see its dedicated chapter).

**The Science Unit:** As its name indicates, the Science Unit is tasked with grounding the work of the Secretariat and the CITES scientific advisory committees in science. The team comprises experts on the status of species, with specialists on both flora and fauna.

This unit supports the work of all actors of the Convention in matters that require extensive and thorough research, such as the discussions on the status of species that might take place during the meetings of the Animals and Plants Committees; the Review of Significant Trade; or the overseeing of species management plans. Another central aspect of the work of the Science Unit team is its role in coordinating all scientific partnerships in which the Secretariat becomes involved.

## CITES Secretariat Finances

The core administrative costs of the Secretariat, the Conference of the Parties and its subsidiary bodies, the Standing Committee and scientific advisory committees, are financed from the general Trust Fund.



This Trust Fund is replenished from contributions from the Parties to the Convention based on the United Nations scale of assessment, adjusted to take account of the fact that not all Members of the United Nations are Parties to the Convention.

Most activities are financed from extra-budgetary contributions to the CITES Activities Trust Fund. Such contributions are provided by donors to CITES that are in a position to provide funding additional to the assessed contribution to the general trust fund. Total contributions to this Trust Fund amounted to USD 10 million annually, including contributions to CTSP, MIKE and ICCWC.