

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



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

ILLEGAL TRADE IN GREAT APES

1. This information document is submitted by the United States of America in relation to agenda item 36.1.*
2. We wish to draw attention of the 19th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the ongoing illegal trade in African great apes, including gorilla (*Gorilla gorilla* and *Gorilla beringei*), chimpanzee (*Pan troglodytes*), and bonobo (*Pan paniscus*), and parts and derivatives thereof. The trafficking of these species threatens their survival in the wild and undermines effective CITES implementation and efforts to combat wildlife trafficking.

Illegal and fraudulent trade in great apes

3. The range of African great apes includes more than 20 countries throughout equatorial Africa. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) currently recognizes nine taxa of African great apes across four species.† All nine taxa are classified as Endangered or Critically Endangered in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, and all are included in CITES Appendix I. With the exception of *G. b. beringei*, populations of all African great apes are in decline.‡.§.**.††
4. While legal international trade in great apes has virtually ceased, the illegal trade continues.‡‡ As with other forms of illegal wildlife trade, trafficking of great apes fuels corruption and undermines the rule of law, hampers opportunities for economic growth, affects sustainable livelihoods, and poses a threat to national and regional security.‡‡

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

† IUCN (2022) THE IUCN RED LIST OF THREATENED SPECIES. <https://www.iucnredlist.org/>.

‡ Plumptre, A., Robbins, M.M. & Williamson, E.A. (2019) *Gorilla beringei*. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2019: e.T39994A115576640. <https://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2019-1.RLTS.T39994A115576640.en>. Accessed on 05 October 2022.

§ Maisels, F., Bergl, R.A. & Williamson, E.A. (2018) *Gorilla gorilla* (amended version of 2016 assessment). The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2018: e.T9404A136250858. <https://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2018-2.RLTS.T9404A136250858.en>. Accessed on 05 October 2022.

** Humle, et al. (2016) *Pan troglodytes* (errata version published in 2018). The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2016: e.T15933A129038584. <https://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2016-2.RLTS.T15933A17964454.en>. Accessed on 05 October 2022.

†† Fruth, B., et al. (2016) *Pan paniscus* (errata version published in 2016). The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2016: e.T15932A102331567. <https://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2016-2.RLTS.T15932A17964305.en>. Accessed on 05 October 2022.

‡‡ London Conference on the Illegal Wildlife Trade (October 2018): Declaration. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/declaration-london-conference-on-the-illegal-wildlife-trade-2018/london-conference-on-the-illegal-wildlife-trade-october-2018-declaration#impact-of-illegal-trade-in-wildlife>.

5. Bushmeat, including meat of primates, has long been seized at U.S. and European airports. For example, a study sequencing the DNA of confiscated passenger-carried packages and shipments at JFK airport in the United States identified chimpanzees and other primate species.^{§§} Such seizures continue. In early 2022, U.S. Customs and Border Protection seized primate meat from a passenger's personal accompanied baggage at Saint Paul International Airport.^{***} According to the *Brussels Times*, a study by the Belgian Public Health Department found that every year 44 tons of domestic and wild animals are imported illegally by passengers and intercepted by Customs officials at Brussels National Airport.^{†††}
6. All African great apes are included in Appendix I, making international trade in these species prohibited for primarily commercial purposes. Today, most instances of African ape trafficking involve parts and derivatives. However, there also continues to be a concerning level of illegal international and national trade in live great apes, especially juveniles. That illegal trade has been valued at between US\$2.1 million and US\$8.8 million annually.^{†††}
7. There is evidence that illegal trade in live African great apes has shifted from being a by-product of hunting for meat to being driven instead by international demand for live animals for entertainment, breeding centers, zoos, amusement parks, travelling circuses, or the pet trade.^{§§§} For example, a 2013 rapid response assessment of illegal trade in great apes estimated that demand from zoos and private owners outside of Africa resulted in the export of over 130 chimpanzees and 10 gorillas under falsified permits from one West African country alone between 2007 and 2013.^{§§§} Other questionable exports of allegedly captive-bred live chimpanzees have occurred from Africa to Asia.^{****} Further, there are indications that the trade in live apes as pets may be increasing, leading to the continued arrival of seized great apes at sanctuaries and rehabilitation centers, which are often the primary recipients of the animals confiscated by law enforcement.^{§§§}
8. The use of fraudulent CITES documents for these transactions remains a concern. A 2017 BBC News investigation into live ape smuggling networks in West Africa reported having successfully purchased two fraudulent permits for the export of chimpanzees.^{††††}

Challenges with confiscated animals

9. Government agencies in great ape range States often lack housing facilities and/or the capacity and resources to care for confiscated live animals. Wildlife sanctuaries and rehabilitation centers specializing in great apes play a pivotal role in the conservation of these species and support range State governments in combating wildlife trafficking. Without wildlife sanctuaries and rehabilitation centers, many governments would be reluctant to confiscate great apes, and they fill an essential gap in providing care for seized animals.

^{§§} Nuwer, R. *The New York Times* (2012, January 13) *From the Jungle to J.F.K., Viruses Cross Borders in Monkey Meat*.

<https://archive.nytimes.com/green.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/01/13/from-the-jungle-to-j-f-k-viruses-cross-borders-in-monkey-meat/>

^{***} U.S. Customs and Border Protection (2022, January 12) *Minnesota CBP Stops the Deadly Introduction of Bushmeat in the U.S.* <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/local-media-release/minnesota-cbp-stops-deadly-introduction-bushmeat-us>

^{†††} *The Brussels Times* (2019, December 3). *Huge quantities of 'bushmeat' pass through Brussels Airport each year.* <https://www.brusselstimes.com/81690/huge-quantities-of-bush-meat-pass-through-brussels-airport-each-year>

^{††††} Rainer, H., White, A. R., & Lanjouw, A. (Eds.). (2020). *State of the Apes: Killing, Capture, Trade and Conservation*. Cambridge University Press.

^{§§§} Stiles, D., Redmond, I., Cress, D., Nellemann, C., Formo, R.K. (eds). 2013. *Stolen Apes – The Illicit Trade in Chimpanzees, Gorillas, Bonobos and Orangutans. A Rapid Response Assessment*. United Nations Environment Programme, GRID-Arendal. www.grida.no

^{****} *Environment News Service* (2020, May 26) *South Africa's Wild Animal Trade to China Exposed.* <https://ens-newswire.com/south-africas-live-wild-animal-trade-to-china-exposed/>

^{†††††} Shukman, D. and Piranty, S. *BBC News* (2017, September 30) *The secret trade in baby chimps.* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/resources/idt-5e8c4bac-c236-4cd9-bacc-db96d733f6cf>

10. The number of chimpanzees confiscated from the illegal trade that arrive at member sanctuaries of the Pan-African Sanctuary Alliance (PASA – an association of 23 accredited member primate sanctuaries and wildlife centers in 13 African countries) has steadily increased in recent years.

Effects on wild populations

11. The level of threat to African apes varies across taxa, but hunting and trade in great apes results in direct impacts and declines in their populations, often resulting in local extinction.^{###} The current level of hunting for bonobos, in particular, threatens this species with extinction.^{††}
12. Although the numbers of African great apes trafficked internationally is not large compared to those of other trafficked species, the figures become much more significant when collateral mortality is taken into account. It is estimated that ~~from~~ 1 to 15 great apes die for every live ape in the illegal trade, depending on the species involved.^{###} One estimate indicates that nearly 3,000 wild great apes are killed in association with the global live ape trade annually.^{####} Such losses have significant impacts on ape populations and the ecosystems in which they occur.^{###} Even these numbers are believed to underestimate the true scale of the illicit ape trade.^{§§§}

Reminders to Parties

13. Resolution Conf. 13.4 (Rev. CoP18) on *Conservation of and trade in great apes*, in part, urges Parties to be particularly vigilant and strictly adhere to the provisions of the Convention regarding any proposed trade in wild-caught or allegedly captive-bred live specimens of great apes.
14. Resolution Conf. 13.4 (Rev. CoP19) also notes governments' commitment to stop illegal trade in specimens of great apes in order to ensure the long-term survival of all populations in the wild and to halt activities that have a detrimental effect on populations of great apes. In addition, the Resolution urges Parties to:
 - a. adopt and implement legislation to prohibit the international trade in great apes for commercial purposes and to establish deterrent penalties for illegal trade;
 - b. strengthen enforcement to stop poaching in habitats and stop smuggling at borders;
 - c. where feasible, determine the origin of confiscated specimens of great apes; and
 - d. provide accurate and up-to-date information on illegal trade in great apes in the CITES Annual Illegal Trade report.
15. Furthermore, the Resolution directs the Standing Committee to review the implementation of this Resolution at each of its regular meetings and to report at each meeting of the Conference of the Parties on the implementation of the Resolution, with any recommendations for further action. Noting these instructions, the United States looks forward to reviewing the Secretariat's report to the 77th meeting of the Standing Committee, tentatively scheduled for November 2023, and working with other Parties and the members of the Standing Committee to identify additional measures to tackle this critical conservation threat.

^{###} Stiles, D. (2016, May 10) *Great Ape Trafficking – an expanding extractive industry*. Commentary by Daniel Stiles. <https://news.mongabay.com/2016/05/great-ape-trafficking-expanding-extractive-industry/>