

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



Joint sessions of the 33rd meeting of the Animals Committee and
the 27th meeting of the Plants Committee
Geneva (Switzerland), 12 - 13 July 2024

Regulation of trade

Materials for the identification of specimens of CITES-listed species

REPORT OF THE INTERSESSIONAL WORKING GROUP

1. This document has been prepared by the co-chairs of the joint inter-sessional working group on the Materials for the identification of specimens of CITES-listed species.*
2. At its 19th meeting (CoP19, Panama City, 2022), the Conference of the Parties adopted Decisions 19.142 to 19.144 on *Materials for the identification of specimens of CITES-listed species* as follows:

Directed to the Animals and Plants Committees, in consultation with the Secretariat

19.142 *The Animals and Plants Committees shall establish a joint working group on identification materials and undertake the following working group tasks, in consultation with the Secretariat:*

- a) *review selected identification materials and assess the need for their revision and improvement, taking into account the materials that are being developed or have already been developed by Parties and materials requested in Decisions or Resolutions;*
- b) *consider ways to improve the accuracy and availability of identification materials on CITES-listed species; and*
- c) *report on the progress with these activities at the meeting(s) of the Animals and Plants Committees.*

Directed to the Secretariat

19.143 *The Secretariat shall:*

- a) *continue collecting information on identification materials and share it through the CITES website and the CITES Virtual College; and*
- b) *report on the progress and make recommendations to the Conference of the Parties, as appropriate.*

* *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.*

Directed to Parties

19.144 *Parties are encouraged to support the efforts of the working group on identification materials by providing to the Secretariat information on available identification and guidance materials that are used by Parties, and particularly by enforcement and inspection officers, to facilitate implementation of the Convention.*

3. At the 26th meeting of the Plants Committee (PC26; Geneva, June 2023) and the 32nd meeting of the Animals Committee (AC32; Geneva, June 2023), the Committees considered a report of the Secretariat in document [PC26 Doc. 19 / AC32 Doc. 19.1 on Materials for the identification of specimens of CITES-listed species](#).

4. The Plants and Animals Committee established a joint intersessional working group (see summary records [PC26 SR](#) and [AC32 SR](#)) with a mandate to:

In consultation with the Secretariat:

- a) review selected identification materials and assess the need for their revision and improvement, taking into account the materials that are being developed or have already been developed by Parties and materials requested in Decisions or Resolutions as well as materials received in response to the Notification to the Parties No. 2023/051, and other relevant information, such as that compiled during previous discussions of joint intersessional working groups established since CoP16 (Bangkok, 2013);
- b) take into consideration other items on the agendas of the Animals and Plants Committees related to the development of identification material to support coordination and avoid duplication of effort;
- c) when assessing gaps in identification materials, take into account those taxa that have been included in the Appendices at higher taxon levels solely due to look-alike issues, as well as the need for frontline and forensic identification tools;
- d) consider ways to improve the accuracy and availability of identification materials on CITES-listed species, including considerations and implications of linking identification materials directly in the Checklist of CITES Species (checklist.cites.org/#/en); and
- e) report on the progress with these activities to the joint session of the 33rd meeting of the Animals Committee and 27th meeting of the Plants Committee.

5. At AC32, the Committee considered document [AC32 Doc. 19.2](#) on *Identification manual of animals listed in CITES Appendix I* submitted by China and encouraged China to feed the results of this identification work into the joint intersessional working group on materials for the identification of specimens of CITES-listed species. China established an expert contact group with four subgroups to collate work in preparation for development of new identification materials and has conducted a gap analysis for Appendix I listed fauna species (AC33 Doc. 19.2).

6. The Secretariat collated all references to identification materials found in Resolutions and Decisions in document PC26 Doc. 19/AC32 Doc. 19.1 Annex 1 and 2. Based on the collated information 39 Resolutions include a reference to identification materials or identifying specimens, with following breakdown:

- a) 13 resolutions apply to both fauna and flora,
- b) 22 resolutions refer to fauna, and
- c) 4 refer to flora species.

7. The main themes within the resolutions were marking/tagging of individuals or specimens, development of identification materials, including forensic techniques, identification of parts and derivatives and dissemination of existing materials. Development of materials as well as identification materials for parts and derivatives were common themes and were both found in nine Resolutions. The need for development of forensic methods were mentioned in six Resolutions. There were 10 sets of decisions with references to identification materials, of which, three were on flora species (timber, *Boswellia* and orchids) and seven were on fauna species (Asian big cats, tortoises and freshwater turtles, pangolins, African lion, saiga antelope,

and sharks and rays). The references in decisions ranged from sharing materials, developing new materials, developing an app, training and reviewing information on challenges on identification.

8. Since 2020, all existing identification manual sheets and other specimen identification materials have been available on the CITES Checklist and Species+ for ease of access. In addition, the CITES Virtual College has been updated to include an [Identification materials database](#). In the existing set of identification materials, there are 2567 unique identification materials, but 4104 total materials when accounting for different languages. Of these, 2295 are primary for identification of whole animals and plants while 272 are primarily for identification of parts and derivatives. The majority of the materials were in English (2276), followed by Spanish (1342) and French (463), but there were also materials in Turkish (10), Chinese (3), Thai (2), Vietnamese (2), and one each in German, Indonesian, Khmer, Malay, Burmese and Portuguese.
9. The identification materials cover various taxonomic levels ranging from subspecies, species, genus, family, class and order levels. Around 2250 taxonomic groups are covered, of which 1942 are on fauna and 193 are on flora. Around 118 materials were for taxonomic groups that are either no longer listed under CITES due to down-listing or listing under a different name due to nomenclature changes.
10. In response to Notification to the Parties No. 2023/051, the Secretariat received responses from the following Parties: Peru, Thailand, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America and the following non-governmental organizations: SharkGuardian Trust, TRAFFIC, Wildlife Conservation Society, and Project Seahorse. Many of the identification materials received were scientific articles, which were not open source and so could not be distributed further due to copyright rules.
11. After analysing these different sets of information, the co-chairs shared the following observations with the Intersessional Working Group to inform the progress report to be submitted to the joint Animals and Plants Committees:
 - a) The scope and volume of materials presented a significant challenge to implement the mandate and a more focused approach is needed.
 - b) The initiative from China on the development of Appendix I listed fauna species remains ongoing and the results, when available, will provide an updated set of identification materials for Appendix I listed fauna species.
 - c) An increasing number of identification materials, especially covering newly described species and forensic related materials are found in books and scientific articles, which are often covered by copyright and so cannot be distributed on the CITES webpages, although sharing the relevant references to scientific publications covered by copyright restrictions could be considered.
 - d) The process for reviewing existing materials and assessing the need for their revision and improvement may benefit from having separate Animals and Plants Committee working groups that conduct targeted reviews, prioritize the identification materials to be reviewed, identify new material needed and provide recommendations relating to the improvement or development of identification materials based on such prioritization.
 - e) With regards to the mandate to consider ways to improve the accuracy and availability of identification materials on CITES-listed species, including considerations and implications of linking identification materials directly in the Checklist of CITES Species (checklist.cites.org/#/en), it is noted that links to identification materials are already provided for in the checklist and Species Plus and the refinement of these will require the identification of the specific needs of the Parties and will require additional resources to implement.
12. Based on these observations, it is proposed that the joint session of the Animals and Plants Committee recommend the revision of the current set of decisions and adoption of a new decision that allow for a more focused approach and align with provisions contained in Resolution Conf. 19.4 on *Materials for the identification of specimens of CITES-listed species*.

Directed to the Secretariat

49-143 (20.AA) *The Secretariat shall issue a Notification to the Parties requesting Parties to:*

- a) share information with the Secretariat relating to the materials used to identify specimens of Appendix-II listed species and Appendix-I listed plants and any challenges experienced in accessing or using existing materials, including gaps in information;
- b) identify specific species in trade for which identification materials need to be developed and indicate if such materials are needed to cover parts and derivatives, as well as whole specimens; and
- c) share the information with the intersessional working groups on Identification materials to inform the selection of identification materials to be reviewed and the prioritization of new material to be developed.
- ~~b) continue collecting information on identification materials and share it through the CITES website and the CITES Virtual College; and~~
- ~~c) report on the progress and make recommendations to the Conference of the Parties, as appropriate.~~

Directed to the Animals ~~and Plants~~ Committees, in consultation with the Secretariat

19.142 (20.BB) The Animals ~~and Plants~~ Committees shall

- a) establish a ~~joint~~ working group on identification materials and undertake the following working group tasks, in consultation with the Secretariat:
 - i) review the information provided by Parties in response to the Notification to the Parties issued by the Secretariat referred to in Decision 20.AA review selected identification materials and assess the need for their revision and improvement, taking into account the materials that are being developed or have already been developed by Parties and materials requested in Decisions or Resolutions;
 - ii) prepare a proposed selection of identification materials to be reviewed and new material to be prioritized for development;
 - iii) review progress made with the initiative by China on the development of identification materials for Appendix-I listed animal species;
 - iv) consider ways to improve the applicability, accuracy and availability of identification materials on CITES-listed animal species; and
 - v) report on the progress with these activities at the meeting(s) of the Animals ~~and Plants~~ Committees.
- b) consider the report of the working group on identification material and make recommendations to the 21st meeting of the Conference of the Parties relating to identification materials to be updated or developed.

Directed to the Plants Committee

20.CC The Plants Committee shall:

- a) establish a working group on identification materials and undertake the following working group tasks, in consultation with the Secretariat:
 - i) review the information provided by Parties in response to the Notification to the Parties issued by the Secretariat referred to in decision 20.AA;
 - ii) prepare a proposed selection of identification materials to be reviewed and new material to be prioritized for development;

- iii) *consider ways to improve the applicability, accuracy and availability of identification materials on CITES-listed plant species; and*
 - iv) *report on the progress with these activities at the meeting(s) of the Plants Committee.*
- b) *consider the report of the working group on identification material and make recommendations to the 21st meeting of the Conference of the Parties relating to identification materials to be updated or developed.*

Directed to Parties

19.144(20.DD) *Parties are encouraged to*

- a) *support the efforts of the working group on identification materials by providing to the Secretariat information on available identification and guidance materials for specimens of Appendix-II listed species that used by Parties and particularly by enforcement and inspection officers, and any challenges experienced or gaps in the available materials, to facilitate the review and development of materials to assist Parties in identification of specimens of CITES-listed species ~~implementation of the Convention.~~; and*
- b) *establish collaboration and communication between key experts/specialists at a national and regional level to assist the Committees in implementing Decisions 20.BB ii) and iv); 20 CC ii) and iii).*

Directed to Parties

20.EE *Parties, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations are encouraged to provide financial and technical assistance to Parties to implement the recommendations made by the Animals and Plants Committees as appropriate.*

Recommendations

13. The Animals and Plants Committees are invited to consider the revised draft decisions contained in paragraph 12 for submission to the 20th meeting of the Conference of the Parties.