

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



Seventy-eighth meeting of the Standing Committee  
Geneva (Switzerland), 3-8 February 2025

Illegal trade and enforcement

ILLEGAL TRADE IN CHEETAHS (*ACINONYX JUBATUS*)

1. This document has been prepared by the Secretariat.
2. At its 19th meeting (CoP19; Panama City, 2022), the Conference of the Parties adopted Decisions 19.104 to 19.106 on *Illegal trade in cheetahs* (*Acinonyx jubatus*), as follows:

***Directed to Parties affected by illegal trade in cheetahs***

**19.104** *Parties affected by illegal trade in cheetahs are encouraged to:*

- a) *review their national legislation taking into consideration the provisions of paragraph 6 c), d), f), and g) in Resolution Conf. 11.3 (Rev.CoP19) on Compliance and enforcement, and where needed revise such legislation to ensure that it adequately addresses illegal wildlife trade, including illegal trade in cheetahs;*
- b) *make use of the secure communication channels provided by INTERPOL and the World Customs Organization to strengthen information and intelligence exchange, and the resources available through the Cheetahs webpage on the CITES website;*
- c) *scale up activities to address illegal online trade in cheetah specimens, including by drawing upon the support available through INTERPOL, the Wildlife Crime Linked to the Internet: Practical Guidelines for Law Enforcement Practitioners, and as appropriate, reviewing their implementation of the provisions under "Regarding wildlife crime linked to the Internet", in Resolution Conf. 11.3 (Rev. CoP19) on Compliance and enforcement, and pursue the full implementation of these provisions; and*
- d) *report to the Secretariat in advance of the 78th meeting of the Standing Committee on the implementation of this Decision.*

***Directed to the Secretariat***

**19.105** *Subject to available resources and upon request from Parties, the Secretariat shall:*

- a) *work with INTERPOL and other ICCWC members to support source, transit and destination Parties to combat illegal trade in cheetahs; and*
- b) *report to the Standing Committee at its 78th meeting on implementation of Decisions 19.104 and 19.105, paragraph a).*

***Directed to the Standing Committee***

**19.106** *The Standing Committee shall consider the report of the Secretariat on implementation of Decisions 19.104 and 19.105, and any relevant outcomes from the CITES Big Cats Task Force specific to*

*the conservation of and illegal trade in cheetahs and develop recommendations for consideration of the Conference of the Parties at its 20th meeting.*

Implementation of Decision 19.105, paragraph a)

3. In support of source, transit and destination Parties to combat illegal trade in big cats, including cheetahs, the Secretariat convened the [CITES Big Cats Task Force meeting](#) in Entebbe, Uganda, from 24 to 28 April 2023. The agreed [outcome document of the CITES Big Cats Task Force](#) is published on the page on [Enforcement matters](#) on the CITES website.
4. As noted in document SC78 Doc. 42 on the *CITES Big Cats Task Force*, at its 77th meeting, the Standing Committee encouraged all Parties affected by illegal trade in specimens of big cat species to make every effort to implement the strategies, measures and activities outlined in the CITES Big Cats Task Force outcome document, as a matter of priority (see summary record [SC77 SR](#), agenda item 39.3).
5. The CITES Big Cats Task Force meeting was held back-to-back with the [Second Meeting of the Range States of the Joint CITES-CMS African Carnivores Initiative \(ACI2\)](#), which provided a platform for range States to discuss the African Carnivore Initiative (ACI) Programme of Work. The ACI is an initiative of the range States of cheetahs (*Acinonyx jubatus*), lions (*Panthera leo*), leopards (*Panthera pardus*) and African wild dogs (*Lycaon pictus* – not included in the CITES Appendices) that have agreed a programme of work on these species. As indicated in document [AC33 SR](#), (agenda item 10), the Animals Committee agreed to propose an amendment to paragraph 1 b) of Resolution Conf. 13.3 on *Cooperation and synergy with the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS)*, by adding a new subparagraph b. v) that *inter alia* include cheetahs (*Acinonyx jubatus*). The Animals Committee furthermore agreed to submit draft decisions for consideration by the Standing Committee at the present meeting, and onward submission to the 20th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP20). These matters are addressed in document SC78 Doc. 6 on *Report of the Chairs of the Animals and Plants Committees*.
6. The Secretariat participated in the Global Cheetah Summit, held from 29 to 31 January 2024, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Organized by the Cheetah Conservation Fund (CCF), in cooperation with the Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority (EWCA), the Global Cheetah Summit gathered over 130 experts from various fields including science, conservation, academia, community leadership, government, international governmental and non-governmental organizations. Participants represented more than 80 institutions from across Africa, the Middle East, India, Europe, and the United States of America. This provided an opportunity for the Secretariat to engage with representatives from cheetah range States and other stakeholders regarding the implementation of CITES Decisions on cheetah, discuss relevant outcomes of the CITES Big Cats Task Force, and increase awareness of important tools such as the [CITES Cheetah Trade Resource Kit](#). The outcome of the Summit was the [Addis Ababa Declaration for Global Cheetah Conservation](#), detailing initiatives to be pursued with a focus on stakeholder engagement, development of strategic conservation plans and formation of working groups around key topics. The Declaration is available on the page on [Cheetahs](#) on the CITES website.
7. The Secretariat also worked with INTERPOL, within the framework of the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICCWC), to support Parties to combat illegal trade in cheetahs. At the time of writing, arrangements were being finalized for INTERPOL to convene a Regional Investigative and Analytical Case Meeting (RIACM) in Nairobi, Kenya, in December 2024. The RIACM will bring together relevant source, transit, and destination Parties to address illegal trade in cheetahs. The Secretariat will provide a further oral update on the implementation of this Decision at the present meeting.

Implementation of Decisions 19.104 and 19.105, paragraph b)

8. To implement Decision 19.104, paragraph d), the Secretariat issued [Notification to the Parties No. 2024/097](#) of 3 September 2024 inviting Parties to submit information to the Secretariat on their implementation of paragraphs a) to c) of Decision 19.104. In response to the Notification, replies were received from Ethiopia, the United States of America, and Yemen. The Secretariat notes that responses to the Notification were limited and thanks these Parties for the information provided. The responses are compiled in an information document for the present meeting in the language they were received and key elements from these reports are summarized in paragraphs 9 to 22 below.

National legislation (Decision 19.104, paragraph a)

*Ethiopia*

9. Ethiopia reported that its National Wildlife Policy and Strategy, as well as its national legislation, were being reviewed to address legislative gaps and facilitate a better response to wildlife crime, including illegal trade in cheetahs. The revised legislation will be submitted to appropriate governmental bodies and the Office of the Prime Minister for approval and endorsement.

*United States of America*

10. The United States of America highlighted in its response that, although not considered a Party affected by illegal trade in cheetahs, they had put in place strong legislative and regulatory measures to address illegal trade in cheetahs and other big cat species, such as the Lacey Act, the Endangered Species Act, the Animal Welfare Act, and the Big Cat Public Safety Act. Parties are invited to consult the report received from the United States of America for more detailed information on the applicable provisions of these acts.

Information and intelligence exchange (Decision 19.104, paragraph b)

11. Ethiopia reported that the Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority (EWCA) collaborated closely with the INTERPOL National Central Bureau in Addis Ababa to exchange relevant information on illegal trade in wildlife (including cheetahs), and other related matters.

Illegal online trade in cheetah specimens (Decision 19.104, paragraph c)

12. Ethiopia also reported that the EWCA received information suggesting that online platforms were being used to promote the illegal sale of wildlife within the country. EWCA is collaborating with Ethio-Telecom to monitor and address these illegal activities.

Other activities related to illegal trade in cheetahs

*Ethiopia*

13. Ethiopia reported that, as part of its efforts to protect and conserve its natural resources, it had established over 65 protected areas including national parks and wildlife sanctuaries. Ethiopia noted that despite these conservation initiatives, poaching and illegal trade continued to pose a serious threat to various species, particularly cheetahs, which were subject to trafficking of both body parts and live cubs for the pet trade. Available information showed that illegal activities were mostly concentrated in the eastern regions of Ethiopia, especially near the Somali border where cross-border trafficking seemed to take place. In response, joint law enforcement efforts were mobilized to confiscate cheetah cubs from traffickers. It was not clear from the report in which time period the cheetah cubs were confiscated.
14. Ethiopia indicated in its response that it had:
  - a) established a cheetah crime database in 2023 and assessed the status of cheetahs and illegal trade in the Somali Regional State (SRS);
  - b) raised awareness regarding cheetahs among communities in key regions;
  - c) established a wildlife rescue centre where confiscated cheetahs are rehabilitated;
  - d) established a Regional Task Force including relevant government offices in the SRS to address wildlife crime in a coordinated manner;
  - e) conducted a two-year mentoring programme in the SRS to enhance the capacity of a total of 20 investigators, prosecutors, and magistrates; training for officers and officials from source and transit countries;
  - f) hosted the first Global Cheetah Summit in 2024; and
  - g) nominated a famous Ethiopian athlete as the Cheetah Goodwill Ambassador.

### *United States of America*

15. The United States of America reported that its Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Office of Law Enforcement (OLE), along with other relevant government agencies, have been undertaking joint investigations. These efforts involved both domestic initiatives and collaboration with international partners to target and disrupt organized criminal networks engaged in poaching and trafficking of cheetahs. A staff member of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, Division of International Conservation, contributed to research to facilitate better understanding of trade routes for illegal trade in cheetahs from the Horn of Africa to the Arabian Peninsula.
16. They also included a summary of financial support provided through the USFWS Division of International Conservation, to combat poaching and cheetah trafficking. Four projects are highlighted: In Saudi Arabia, the United States of America supported a partnership with the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) to strengthen law enforcement capacities, reduce demand, and address the social drivers of cheetah trafficking. In Ethiopia, the African Wildlife Foundation received funding to improve judicial and enforcement systems, particularly in the SRS, and to enhance regional cooperation against wildlife crime. Further, a project led by the Colorado State University was mapping cheetah habitats in the Horn of Africa, providing training for local officials, and engaging communities to support cheetah conservation. Finally, the Cheetah Conservation Fund received support to conduct population surveys and genetic analyses across different regions to supply governments with data for conservation planning and law enforcement.

### *Yemen*

17. Yemen reported that no field studies or investigations on the smuggling of cheetahs had been conducted in the country, but that available information suggested the existence of illegal trade from the Horn of Africa affecting Yemen. The Party indicated that it is unlikely that there is a domestic market for cheetahs in the country and that specimens likely only transit through Yemen to other countries.
18. Yemen noted that the security situation and economic conditions in the country pose serious challenges to the effective implementation and enforcement of CITES, but that efforts have nevertheless been made. In 2022, staff from the Environment Protection Authority received training related to addressing illegal trade involving cheetahs. The CITES Management Authority (MA) of Yemen also implemented several awareness raising campaigns at key checkpoints. The MA engaged in efforts to collect information on individuals suspected to be involved in illegal cheetah trade and established contact with relevant authorities, in particular the Coast Guard, to address this illegal trade.
19. Training on CITES implementation and addressing cheetah trafficking for authorities in the city of Mocha was planned to take place in November 2024. Mocha was specifically chosen due to its strategic location close to the Horn of Africa.
20. Yemen reported that no cheetah confiscations had been recorded in the country, citing challenging conditions that restrict enforcement capabilities across various regions.
21. The Secretariat notes that Yemen reported significant challenges in combating wildlife crime, largely due to economic constraints and limited resources, as well as an unstable security situation. The Party reported a significant need for training on CITES implementation and enforcement, as well as several other needs.
22. The Secretariat, in its collaboration with INTERPOL, has recommended Yemen's participation in the RIACM on illegal trade in cheetahs, as referenced in paragraph 7 of the present document. The Secretariat will take Yemen's request for assistance in consideration as part of its capacity-building activities.

### *Somalia*

23. In addition to the responses to Notification to the Parties No. 2024/097, the Secretariat received a letter from Somalia requesting assistance from ICCWC to support Somalia's efforts to address illegal trade in cheetahs and other wildlife crimes. ICCWC partner organizations agreed to invite Somalia to participate in the RIACM mentioned in paragraph 7 of the present document. The Secretariat will take Somalia's request for assistance in consideration as part of its capacity-building activities.
24. In its letter, Somalia also welcomed any support in form of projects, technical assistance, training, grants or other support.

## Conclusions

25. The Committee may wish to encourage Parties, governmental, intergovernmental, non-governmental organizations and donors to take note of the request for support from Somalia and Yemen and, where possible, to consider assistance based on identified needs of these Parties.
26. Decision 19.106 directs the Standing Committee to consider the report of the Secretariat on implementation of Decisions 19.104 and 19.105, along with any relevant outcomes from the CITES Big Cats Task Force specific to the conservation of and illegal trade in cheetahs and develop recommendations for consideration of the Conference of the Parties at its 20th meeting. The Secretariat believes that the measures and activities outlined in the CITES Big Cats Task Force outcome document provides a strong basis for Parties to initiate or strengthen efforts aimed at combatting illegal trade in specimens of cheetahs. In particular, paragraphs 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 3, 4, and 5 address key enforcement matters; reporting of illegal trade data and other relevant data; legislation related to big cat species in trade; corruption; demand reduction to combat illegal trade in big cat specimens; illegal trade on the Internet, social media and corporate social responsibility; identification of big cats specimens in trade (including reference to the *CITES Cheetah Trade Resource Kit* and fact sheets); and strengthening regional and international collaboration to address illegal trade in specimens of big cats.
27. In light of the limited responses to [Notification to the Parties No. 2024/097](#), the Secretariat considers that the matters outlined in Decision 19.104 could benefit from further attention. The Secretariat therefore proposes to replace Decisions 19.104 to 19.106 with new draft decisions which also take into consideration the outcomes from the CITES Big Cats Task Force. These are presented as draft decisions 20.AA to 20.CC in the Annex to the present document,. If agreed, Decisions 19.104 to 19.106 can be deleted.

## Recommendations

28. The Standing Committee is invited to:
  - a) note the responses to Notification to the Parties No. 2024/097, and that these responses were limited;
  - b) encourage Parties, governmental, intergovernmental, non-governmental organizations, and donors, to take note of the need for support to Somalia and Yemen and, where possible, to provide assistance based on identified needs of these Parties;
  - c) review and submit draft decisions 20.AA to 20.CC in the Annex to the present document to the Conference of the Parties; and
  - d) agree that Decisions 19.104 to 19.106 can be deleted.

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

***Directed to Parties affected by illegal trade in cheetahs***

**20.AA** Parties affected by illegal trade in cheetahs are encouraged to pursue the recommendations outlined in the [CITES Big Cats Task Force outcome document](#), particularly to:

- a) if they have not already done so, review their national legislation, taking into consideration the relevant provisions in Resolution Conf. 11.3 (Rev.CoP20) on *Compliance and enforcement* and, where needed, revise such legislation to ensure that it adequately addresses illegal wildlife trade, including illegal trade in cheetahs;
- b) ensure that adequate resources and capacities to enforce legislation addressing illegal trade in cheetahs are in place;
- c) strengthen regional and international collaboration to address illegal trade in cheetahs;
- d) scale up activities to address illegal online trade in cheetah specimens, including by drawing upon the support available through INTERPOL, the [Wildlife Crime Linked to the Internet: Practical Guidelines for Law Enforcement Practitioners](#), and as appropriate, reviewing their implementation of the provisions under “Regarding wildlife crime linked to the Internet”, in Resolution Conf. 11.3 (Rev. CoP20); and
- e) report to the Secretariat on the implementation of this Decision.

***Directed to the Secretariat***

**20.BB** The Secretariat shall report to the Standing Committee on the implementation of Decision 20.AA, together with any recommendations it may have.

***Directed to the Standing Committee***

**20.CC** The Standing Committee shall consider the report of the Secretariat in accordance with Decision 20.BB and make recommendations to the Parties by the 21st meeting of the Conference of the Parties, as appropriate.