

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



Seventy-seventh meeting of the Standing Committee
Geneva (Switzerland), 6–10 November 2023

Illegal trade and enforcement

Enforcement

CITES BIG CATS TASK FORCE (FELIDAE SPP.)

1. This document has been prepared by the Secretariat.
2. At its 19th meeting (CoP19; Panama City, 2022), the Conference of the Parties adopted Decisions 19.92 and 19.93 on the *CITES Big Cats Task Force*, as follows:

Directed to the Secretariat

19.92 *The Secretariat shall subject to external resources*

- a) *establish and convene, the CITES Big Cats Task Force (Task Force), in accordance with the terms of reference and modus operandi agreed by the Standing Committee as presented in Annex 2 to document CoP19 Doc. 67 on CITES Big Cats Task Force (Felidae spp.);*
- b) *provide support to the Task Force allowing it to effectively carry out its mandate as stated in the terms of reference, including to:*
 - i) *discuss enforcement and implementation issues related to the illegal trade in specimens of big cats;*
 - ii) *as deemed appropriate, exchange intelligence and other information on the illegal trade in big cats; and*
 - iii) *develop strategies and make recommendations to improve international cooperation regarding the enforcement of CITES concerning illegal trade in specimens of big cats; and*
- c) *report the findings and recommendations of the Task Force to the 77th and 78th meeting of the Standing Committee for its consideration, and for making its own recommendations as appropriate.*

Directed to the Standing Committee

19.93 *The Standing Committee shall:*

- a) *consider at its 77th meeting the reports submitted by the Secretariat, as per Decision 19.92, and make recommendations to the Secretariat and big cat source, transit, and destination countries, as appropriate.*
- b) *report on the implementation of the present Decision and any relevant recommendations as appropriate to the Conference of the Parties at its 20th meeting.*

- c) *publish information generated by the Big Cat Task Force on the CITES website to keep relevant stakeholders informed and support the development of appropriate measures by source, transit, and destination countries.*

Implementation of Decision 19.92

3. The Secretariat convened the [CITES Big Cats Task Force meeting](#) (the Task Force meeting) in Entebbe, Uganda, from 24 to 28 April 2023. The Secretariat would like to take this opportunity to thank Uganda for the logistical support provided to the Secretariat during the meeting, as well as the United States of America for its financial contribution that supported implementation of the Decision. As required by Decision 19.92, paragraph a), the Task Force meeting was convened in accordance with the terms of reference and *modus operandi* agreed by the Standing Committee. In accordance with these terms of reference and *modus operandi*, the meeting agenda was developed in consultation with the Chairs of the Standing and Animals Committees. The Task Force was held back-to-back with the Second Range State Meeting of the CITES and the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) Joint African Carnivores Initiative (ACI), which took place in Entebbe, from 1 to 4 May 2023.
4. The Task Force meeting was conducted in all three languages of the Convention and brought together CITES authorities and national agencies responsible for law enforcement from 28 Parties¹ affected by illegal trade in big cat species, located across five CITES regions (Africa, Asia, Central and South America and the Caribbean, Europe and North America). In addition, attendees included invited representatives from the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICWC) partner agencies, other intergovernmental organizations, regional Wildlife Enforcement Networks, non-governmental organizations and various experts. In total, over 70 representatives participated in the Task Force meeting.
5. These representatives actively engaged in deliberations, discussing enforcement and implementation issues related to illegal trade in specimens of big cats, exchanging information and identifying strategies, measures and activities to improve international collaboration regarding the enforcement of the Convention to address illegal trade in specimens of big cat species. The Task Force meeting concluded with a consensus outcome document contained in the Annex to the present document. The outcome document comprehensively outlines the measures and activities to be undertaken to address the following key topics:
 - a) strengthening effective implementation and enforcement of the Convention with regards to illegal trade in big cat specimens;
 - b) strengthening regulation of facilities breeding big cats in captivity to prevent and detect any illegal trade from such facilities and deploy strengthened enforcement measures;
 - c) reducing demand to combat illegal trade in big cat specimens;
 - d) identification of big cat specimens in trade; and
 - e) strengthening regional and international collaboration to address illegal trade in specimens of big cats.
6. The Secretariat made the [CITES Big Cats Task Force outcome document](#) available on the Enforcement webpage of its website. The Secretariat is of the view that the strategies, measures and activities identified and presented in the outcome document provide a solid basis for Parties to initiate or strengthen efforts aimed at combatting illegal trade in specimens of big cat species.
7. One element of the outcome document outlined in paragraph 1.1 requires consideration by the Standing Committee. In paragraph 1.1, the CITES Secretariat is invited to consider the merits of a resolution on illegal trade in big cats to strengthen effective implementation and enforcement of the Convention with regard to illegal trade in big cat specimens, including a possible revision of Resolution 12.5 (Rev. CoP19) on *Conservation of and trade in tigers and other Appendix-I Asian big cat species* to increase the scope to make it applicable to all big cat species. The Secretariat was invited to include this in its report to the Standing Committee.

¹ *Representatives from the following Parties attended the Task Force meeting: Bangladesh, Brazil, Cambodia, Cameroon, China, Czech Republic, Ethiopia, India, Kenya, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Mozambique, Nepal, Netherlands, Nigeria, Peru, Senegal, Somalia, South Africa, Suriname, Thailand, Togo, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, United States of America, Viet Nam, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.*

8. As directed in Decision 19.93, the Standing Committee is required to consider the report submitted by the Secretariat and make its own recommendations as appropriate. The Secretariat seeks the guidance of the Standing Committee regarding the invitation in paragraph 1.1 of the outcome document. The Secretariat notes that, should the Committee consider that there is a need for a resolution on illegal trade in big cats or a revision of Resolution Conf. 12.5 (Rev. CoP19), the contents of the CITES Big Cats Task Force outcome document could potentially serve as a basis for this work..
9. The Committee may further wish to encourage 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.

Recommendations

10. The Standing Committee is invited to:
 - a) consider the proposal of a resolution on illegal trade in big cats, including the possible revision of Resolution 12.5 (Rev. CoP19) on *Conservation of and trade in tigers and other Appendix-I Asian big cat species* to be applicable to all big cat species and provide guidance to the Secretariat in this regard; and
 - b) encourage 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.

CITES Big Cats Task Force meeting 24-28 April 2023

OUTCOME DOCUMENT

In accordance with the terms of reference, participants in the CITES Big Cats Task Force meeting discussed enforcement and implementation issues related to illegal trade in specimens of big cats and exchanged intelligence and other information on the illegal trade in big cats. In accordance with Decision 19.92, the participants identified strategies, measures and activities to improve international collaboration regarding the enforcement of the Convention to address illegal trade in specimens of big cat species.

1. Strengthen effective implementation and enforcement of the Convention with regards to illegal trade in big cat specimens

1.1 To strengthen effective implementation and enforcement of the Convention with regard to illegal trade in big cat specimens, it was agreed to invite the CITES Secretariat to consider the merits of a resolution on illegal trade in big cats, including a possible revision of Resolution 12.5 (Rev. CoP19) on *Conservation of and trade in tigers and other Appendix-I Asian big cat species* to be applicable to all big cat species and include this in its report to the Standing Committee.

1.2 It was also agreed that it was important for Parties to:

Regarding enforcement

- a) establish or strengthen multi-agency units consisting of vetted staff from government agencies responsible for wildlife law enforcement, e.g., customs, police, forest and wildlife authorities, and prosecutors to address illegal trade and trafficking of specimens of big cat species in line with Resolution Conf. 11.3 (Rev. CoP19) on *Compliance and enforcement*, paragraph 10 a) and paragraph 11 in Resolution Conf. 18.6. on *Designation and role of Management Authorities*;
- b) ensure adequate resources and capacities to enforce legislation addressing illegal trade in big cat specimens including by:
 - i) sensitizing prosecutors and judges on the seriousness of wildlife crime, including matters affecting big cats; and
 - ii) strengthening the capacity of law enforcement officers to use innovative law enforcement and investigative methods and techniques, including intelligence-led investigation, technology and forensic analytical techniques in line with Resolution Conf. 12.5 (Rev. CoP19), paragraph 1 d) and Resolution Conf. 11.3 (Rev. CoP19), paragraph 9;
- c) where relevant, make use of the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime ([ICWC](#)) [Indicator Framework for Combating Wildlife and Forest Crime](#) (a self-assessment framework for national use) to measure and monitor the effectiveness of their law enforcement responses to wildlife crime and illegal trade in big cat species and further encourage application of the full ICWC toolkit and donor Parties to financially support the implementation action plans arising from the toolkit application;

Regarding the CITES annual illegal trade data and other data

- d) submit information on seizures of specimens of big cat species in their Annual Illegal Trade Report in accordance with paragraph 3 of Resolution Conf. 11.17 (Rev. CoP19) on *National reports* and Resolution Conf. 12.5 (Rev. CoP19), paragraph 1 e);
- e) analyze data concerning illegal trade in specimens of big cat species available in the CITES Illegal Trade Database and through other appropriate sources, to ensure effective and timely responses to any existing or newly emerging threats; and
- f) implement measures to address any data and information gaps regarding population trends, use, illegal trade, substitutes or other relevant matters that are identified, with the aim to identify and engage where appropriate, potential partners at national, regional and international level to cooperate in fighting big cat trafficking.

1.3 In recognition of the importance of comprehensive legislation related to big cat species in trade, consider amending national regulations to address illegal trade in big cats in relation to non-native/exotic species, hybrid animals bred in captivity, and regulations to prevent trade in readily recognizable derivatives.

Regarding addressing corruption

1.4 To address and mitigate corruption risks, it was agreed that it is important for Parties to:

- a) pursue the implementation of [Resolution Conf. 17.6 \(Rev. CoP19\)](#) on *Prohibiting, preventing, detecting and countering corruption, which facilitates activities conducted in violation of the Convention*, including in the context of illegal trade in specimens of big cat species;
- b) undertake risk assessments to identify high corruption risk areas associated with big cat species and develop and implement accordingly strategies to counter corruption, including by developing and implementing corruption prevention policies, codes of conduct and ethics for staff working on big cat issues; and
- c) pursue enhancing collaboration between relevant governmental agencies, civil society organizations and other relevant stakeholders on the implementation of measures to prevent and combat corruption associated with trade in big cats.

2. Strengthen regulation of facilities breeding big cats in captivity to prevent and detect any illegal trade from such facilities and deploy strengthened enforcement measures

2.1 To strengthen the regulation of facilities breeding big cats (native and exotic) in captivity to prevent and detect any illegal trade from such facilities and deploy strengthening enforcement measures, it was agreed that Parties are urged to:

- a) if they have not already done so, develop in consultation with relevant stakeholders, adopt and implement national legislation and protocols to regulate breeding of big cats in captivity to prevent any illegal activities that could be associated with such facilities, including by:
 - i) requiring licensing (subject to regular renewal) of each facility breeding big cats and establishing a national register of big cat breeding facilities, including marking for identification and registration of each individual big cat (for example by using photos, microchips, DNA samples) and their history (origin/affiliation, transfer, reproduction, death and disposal) (reference to Decision 14.69);
 - ii) addressing husbandry and welfare conditions based on national and international guidance and best practices for keeping big cats in captivity;
 - iii) taking into consideration the purpose of breeding, contribution to conservation and adequacy of management of the facility when considering any applications for licenses and evaluating and monitoring existing facilities;
 - iv) undertaking regular inspections, monitoring and audits of big cat breeding facilities as well as conducting unannounced spot checks by authorized personnel, based on established procedures/protocols; and
 - v) establishing protocols for the disposal of big cat specimens, in line with Resolution Conf. 17.8 (Rev. CoP19) on *Disposal of illegally traded and confiscated specimens of CITES-listed species* and keeping accurate record of such disposal in accordance with Resolution Conf. 12.5 (Rev. CoP19), paragraph 1 h);

2.2 Parties are encouraged to apply the above measures to entities keeping big cats in captivity.

2.3 It was furthermore agreed that Parties should:

- a) with respect to tigers and other Asian big cat species, implement paragraph 1 h) of Resolution Conf. 12.5 (Rev. CoP19);
- b) strengthen the capacity and resources for effective inspection of big cat captive breeding facilities and rescue centres; and
- c) where applicable, consider strengthening the regulation of private possession/ownership of big cat specimens to help address illegal trade.

3. Reducing demand to combat illegal trade in big cat specimens

3.1 With the aim of reducing demand to combat illegal trade in big cat specimens, it was agreed that it was important for Parties to:

- a) implement evidence-based behavior change initiatives to reduce such demand in line with Resolution Conf. 17.4 (Rev. CoP19) on *Demand reduction strategies to combat illegal trade in CITES-listed species* and the *Guidance for CITES Parties to Develop and Implement Demand Reduction Strategies to Combat Illegal Trade in CITES-listed Species* endorsed at CoP19;
- b) consider addressing the underlying drivers of demand within communities in source countries, e.g., by investing in livelihood approaches;
- c) consider addressing the underlying drivers of demand in destination countries; and
- d) strengthen national legislation to close any domestic commercial markets for specimens of big cat species that are contributing to poaching or illegal trade including in line with Resolution Conf. 12.5 (Rev. CoP19), para. 1 c).

Regarding collaboration and information sharing

- e) identify existing research into uses of big cats and support additional research where gaps are identified;
- f) share demand reduction case studies concerning big cats, information on tools that support and are relevant to the conservation, protection and addressing illegal trade in big cats and other information among practitioners, including through open access platforms;

Regarding illegal trade on the Internet, social media and corporate social responsibility

- g) engage online platforms to raise public awareness of illegal trade in specimens of big cat species in line with Resolution Conf. 11.3 (Rev. CoP19), subparagraphs 16 f) and g); and
- h) through partnerships and other mechanisms, address the role and influence of social media and online platforms in creating demand for and facilitating illegal trade in big cats.

4. Identification of big cat specimens in trade

4.1 To facilitate detection of illegal consignments of big cat specimens, species identification, and the mobilization of available tools, it was agreed that Parties should:

Regarding available tools for identification

- a) assess the capacities and needs with regard to identification of big cat specimens and provide capacity-building as well as training on the available tools for frontline enforcement personnel;
- b) draw upon existing tools regarding identification of specimens of big cats species such as the *Asian Big Cat Field Pocket Guide for law enforcement front line officers* and the *CITES Cheetah Trade Resource Kit* and fact sheets, which includes among other things detailed identification guides for both live cheetahs and cheetah specimens; and [CITES Identification Materials](#) available on the CITES website; and
- c) develop and disseminate guides, apps, manuals and printed materials for identifying specimens of other big cat species in illegal trade amongst frontline law enforcement officers;

Regarding the use of forensic science

- d) develop, standardize and disseminate Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and simplified procedures to facilitate sample collection from seized big cat specimens for forensic analysis to, as applicable, support species identification, determine geographical origin, identify individual animals and verify their wild or captive source and support investigative processes; and
- e) promote and encourage the standardization of forensic techniques concerning big cat identification as well as technique validation to facilitate the sharing of information and data across laboratories.

4.2 Parties are encouraged to:

- a) use the [CITES Directory of Laboratories that Conduct Wildlife Forensic Testing](#);
- b) share additional forensic expertise and tools with the CITES Secretariat for inclusion on the CITES webpage on [Wildlife Forensics](#);

- c) take note that the United States Fish and Wildlife Service Forensics Laboratory, within the limits of its resources, makes its services freely available to any CITES Party for analyses of big cat samples at its premises, and to reach out to the laboratory for support as may be needed;
- d) take note that methods for the identification of tiger species and specimens have been developed by the Czech Republic and that analytical kits for use of these methods, as well as testing of tiger samples, are available to Parties free of charge, as outlined in Decision 19.109, para c);
- e) gather and maintain information on specialists in big cat identification and laboratories that can assist with analyses in support of big cat identification, for such information to be at hand when needed; and
- f) where possible, share big cat reference materials and information with recognized institutions, to support the development of forensic analysis techniques and reference databases in different countries, allowing for quick in-country or regional level analysis and the findings of such analyses.

Regarding information sharing

4.3 Parties are encouraged to utilise the CITES Secretariat website to collect and make available big cat identification resources and seek assistance from CITES bodies in developing and promulgating identification materials tailored to national or regional needs in accordance with [Resolution 19.4 on Materials for identification of specimens of CITES-listed species](#) and Decision 19.109, para a) and b), as well as outlined in [Notification to the Parties 2023/051](#) of 20 April 2023.

Regarding registration of forensic research institutions

4.4 Parties are encouraged to consider registration of forensic research institutions in the CITES Register of scientific institutions to facilitate and expedite the exchange of big cat forensic research specimens in accordance with Article VII, paragraph 6, of the Convention and [Resolution Conf. 11.15 \(Rev. CoP18\) on Non-commercial loan, donation or exchange of museum, herbarium, diagnostic and forensic research specimens](#).

5. Strengthen regional and international collaboration to address illegal trade in specimens of big cats

5.1 To strengthen regional and international collaboration in addressing illegal trade in big cats, it was agreed that it is important for Parties to:

- a) share information in order to harmonize legislation to address wildlife crime, including illegal trade in big cats [e.g., through Wildlife Enforcement Network (WEN) frameworks];
- b) where not yet done, consider developing Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) or similar bilateral/regional agreements to facilitate transboundary monitoring and intelligence-sharing, collaboration and information exchange to address illegal trade in specimens of big cat species and to prevent any concerns about data usage;
- c) where not yet done, implement provisions of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) and provide mutual legal assistance to disrupt transnational organized crime in big cats and to enter into extradition agreements;
- d) where not yet done, designate enforcement focal points to facilitate information sharing and coordination of enforcement efforts with regard to illegal trade in big cats;
- e) take advantage of existing mechanism/platforms [e.g., INTERPOL, World Customs Organization (WCO), regional policing bodies such as ASEANAPOL, EUROPOL, etc.] for regional and international cooperation on illegal trade in big cats;
- f) increase the use of INTERPOL secure communication channels (I-24/7) and Notices to share and exchange information about illegal trade in big cat species and the criminals involved;
- g) explore opportunities, where illegal trade in specimens of big cat species is detected, to engage with INTERPOL, the WCO and other ICCWC partners for support as may be needed;
- h) facilitate analysis and timely operational activities by sharing information with source, transit or destination countries as applicable on seizures involving big cat specimens, including information on *modus operandi*, accompanying documentation, details of offenders involved, and any other information that could assist the initiation of investigations; and
- i) make every effort to participate in the global law enforcement operations convened by INTERPOL and the WCO to address illegal wildlife trade in line with Resolution Conf. 11.3 (Rev. CoP19), para. 14 d) and consider initiating or continuing similar operations at national and regional levels, in particular targeting poaching and illegal trade in big cat species.

- 5.2 Parties were encouraged to explore opportunities to join existing or new platforms, such as the International Big Cat Alliance as proposed by India for sharing information, best practices and ideas which may be of assistance to address illegal trade in big cats and associated issues for big cat conservation.
- 5.3 It was also agreed to invite intergovernmental agencies and regional WENs to expand their work on illegal trade in big cats and further invite:
- a) INTERPOL to explore opportunities to convene Regional Investigative and Analytical Case meetings (RIACM) focusing on cases involving illegal trade in specimens of big cat species;
 - b) INTERPOL and the WCO to explore opportunities to coordinate targeted regional or international operations focusing on combating illegal trade in big cat species; and
 - c) WENs to consider including in their work programmes activities aimed specifically at addressing illegal trade in big cat species.

Regarding mobilizing investigations into illicit financial flows

- 5.4 To mobilize investigations into illicit financial flows from illegal trade in big cat species, Parties should:
- a) implement national legislation to combat money laundering and facilitate asset forfeiture in cases associated with illegal trade in big cats and other serious wildlife crime, and actively implement activities bringing together wildlife trade and money laundering expertise, including from financial intelligence units, as anticipated by subparagraphs 6. d) and f) in Resolution Conf. 11.3 (Rev. CoP19) on *Compliance and enforcement*;
 - b) to the extent possible, ensure that there is adequate capacity to conduct financial investigations, to quantify the value of illegal trade in big cats, and to identify international financial flows related to the illegal trade in big cats, and
 - c) increase awareness amongst national authorities about the importance of incorporating financial investigations in investigations concerning illegal trade in big cat species and other serious wildlife crimes.
- 5.5 Parties are encouraged to draw upon the tools and reports developed by the Financial Action Task Force, the Egmont Centre of FIU Excellence and Leadership (ECOFEL), the Southern African Anti-Money Laundering Integrated Task Force (SAAMLIT), Asset Recovery Interagency Networks (e.g. ARIN, CARIN), etc. and ICCWC partners available on the Enforcement and ICCWC webpages on the CITES Secretariat website, in support of strengthening their work to address illicit financial flows from illegal trade in big cat species and other serious wildlife crimes.