

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



Twenty-eighth meeting of the Animals Committee
Tel Aviv (Israel), 30 August-3 September 2015

Trade controls and marking

Review of identification and guidance material (Decision 16.59)^{*}

IMPROVEMENTS TO THE CITES IDENTIFICATION MATERIALS

The attached information document has been submitted by the Secretariat at the request of the United Nations Environment Programme's World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC) in relation to agenda item 10.¹

^{*} This agenda item is addressed to the Animals and Plants Committees.

¹ 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.

Improvements to the CITES Identification Materials

Options to promote accuracy and availability of identification material to the Parties to CITES

Context and justification

Identification of specimens in trade is fundamental to the effective implementation and day-to-day enforcement of the Convention. Legal international wildlife trade involves millions of animal and plant products annually, derived from nearly 35,000 species regulated under CITES. At the national level, enforcement authorities must be able to quickly determine if a species is listed in CITES, and if so, on which Appendix and whether any trade restrictions may apply. At the same time, illegal wildlife trade is a major concern for the global community; it threatens the modern rule of law, survival of species and populations, and undermines the economic benefits that can arise from well managed legal trade. Easy access to good identification materials is key.

Customs officials are faced with a growing number of transactions, but the right tools can facilitate this process despite the growing complexities. The existing CITES Wiki Identification Manual needs to evolve to better support these processes fully. This project aims to improve the enforcement of CITES by providing an updated Identification Manual fit for use by enforcement authorities.

There are three options for improving the species identification materials for CITES Parties:

1. Development of a new CITES Species Identification tool integrated with Species+ (speciesplus.net) *(includes integration of Wiki Identification Manual sheets and new materials into Species+, as well as a user needs assessment)*
2. Simple integration of CITES Wiki Identification Manual information in Species+ species pages *(would not include new materials)*
3. Update the existing CITES Wiki Identification Manual *(would not include new materials or migration onto a modern platform)*

Option 1. Development of a new CITES Species Identification tool integrated with Species+ (speciesplus.net)

Identification materials from the current CITES Wiki Identification Manual, as well as additional materials produced by CITES Secretariat, Parties, NGOs and other organisations that are available for use, would be made available in an accessible, modern platform via Species+. Species+ contains up-to-date legal information for species of global concern and represents an ideal platform to provide access to these identification resources. A mechanism for adding new identification materials will be included to allow for updates to the system as new materials are made available. Incorporating the identification materials within Species+ will allow enforcement officials to easily access all the information they need to determine what species they are looking at, whether the species is listed and how the species is regulated under the provisions of CITES.

Activities and outputs

The project will undertake the following activities:

1. Needs assessment with enforcement authorities to inform the design of the Identification tool
2. Identify and prepare identification resources for upload into the new system (including CITES Wiki ID Manual sheets, as well as additional resources available from the Secretariat, Parties and NGOs)
3. Build platform for storing materials and admin interface in Species+ to manage identification material data content
4. Build and design of user interface for identification material access in Species+
5. Upload identification materials into Species+
6. User testing

This project will produce the following outputs:

1. A new Identification tool that is interlinked with Species+ and which allows access to identification materials and up-to-date taxonomic and legal information in one centralised platform. Users can search for particular species pages to access relevant identification materials. Users are able to access identification materials at higher taxonomic level and to view information on the identification of parts and derivatives in trade for different taxa. The tool incorporates the materials from the CITES Wiki ID Manual and other identification materials, as compiled by Parties and others.
2. The Identification tool will be built on a modern, open-source platform that offers the flexibility to add functionalities in the future, such as step-by-step product-to-taxon identification.

Collaborators

This project seeks to compile identification information into one platform and therefore actively seeks collaboration with stakeholders who have compiled such information. Potential partners will be approached, including Customs organizations, the CITES Secretariat, CITES authorities and experts in various taxonomic groups to seek permission for incorporation of materials.

Risks

Some of the species included in the original Wiki ID Manual sheets may have been subject to changes in CITES Standard Nomenclature, adding complexities. New materials will be subject to permission for use being granted by partners and collaborators.

Option 2. Simple integration of CITES Wiki Identification Manual information in Species+ species pages

The contents of the CITES Wiki Identification Manual will be integrated and accessible via Species+. Species+ contains up-to-date legal information for species of global concern and by replacing the old platform and integrating the identification sheets in Species+, enforcement authorities only need to access one database to access the identification sheets and at the same time determine whether wildlife in transit is regulated internationally and whether any trade restrictions apply.

Activities and outputs

The project will undertake the following activities:

1. Identify and prepare identification resources for upload into the new system (CITES Wiki ID Manual sheets only)
2. Build platform for storing materials and admin interface in Species+ to manage identification material data content
3. Build and design of user interface for identification material access in Species+
4. Upload identification materials into Species+
5. User testing

This project will produce the following output:

1. Wiki ID Manual sheets accessible via Species+, which provides a user-friendly search (scientific and common names) and allows access to identification materials and up-to-date taxonomic and legal information.

Risks

Some of the species included in the original Wiki ID Manual sheets developed in around 2002 may have been subject to changes in CITES Standard Nomenclature. Species+ follows the most up-to-date CITES taxonomy, therefore some of the sheets may no longer be in line with the current taxonomy and may need to be excluded from upload into Species+. By only including the existing CITES Wiki ID Manual sheets, and not incorporating new identification materials that have been recently produced, Parties will not benefit from new materials that have been more recently produced.

Option 3. Update the existing Wiki Identification Manual

The current CITES Wiki Identification Manual contains only species information sheets. In total, there are roughly 1400 animal sheets and 165 plant sheets but other sheets comprising “Information sheets”, “Parts and derivatives sheets” and “higher taxon sheets” were not initially incorporated into the Wiki Id Manual and account for the main gaps in the content. This option would maintain the existing platform of the Wiki Identification Manual but include the missing information, and improve the user interface to render it more user-friendly.

Activities and outputs

The project will undertake the following activities:

1. Preliminary data gap analysis
2. Migration and data upload into the Wiki Identification Manual
3. Improvements to the interface to only display species with sheets (instead of all species)
4. Improvements to the interface to view index of all sheets in the Wiki Identification manual
5. Modification of the search to enable a search for information sheets and parts and derivatives sheets

This project will produce the following outputs:

1. Additional sheets are available within the Wiki Identification Manual (estimated at 370 species-, 220 information-, and 200 parts and derivatives sheets).
2. Improved search facility for accessing the information, so that it is clearer what identification materials are available.

Risks

The original Wiki Identification Manual Sheets were prepared as a paper version in ~2002 and originally uploaded in 2009. The species included in the Wiki ID Manual may have been subject to changes in CITES Standard Nomenclature. This option does not include work to update the nomenclature associated with these species sheets, as this would require closer links with the CITES Checklist and Species+ and would require an upgrade to the underlying technology of the system.

The Wiki application has not seen huge uptake (particularly the wiki element of it), and is a standalone application written on out dated technology. Whilst this work will improve that application considerably, work will still be required to raise the applications profile and get people using the tool, so it has some measurable impact.

About UNEP-WCMC

The UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC) is the specialist biodiversity assessment centre of the United Nations Environment Programme. The Centre has been in operation for over 30 years, combining scientific research with policy advice and the development of decision-support tools. To do this, we source, verify and collate data on biodiversity and ecosystem services; interpret and analyse information to provide comprehensive assessments and policy advice; and make the results available in appropriate forms for national and international level decision-makers and businesses.

In the delivery of its biodiversity portfolio at the Centre, UNEP collaborates with WCMC, a UK not-for-profit organisation that provides the expertise of dozens of specialists in the fields of biodiversity and ecosystem services in marine and terrestrial environments, as well as experts in information systems.

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About CITES

CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) is an international agreement between governments. Its aim is to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival. CITES has a large membership, with 178 Parties. The Convention works by subjecting international trade in specimens of selected species to certain controls. All trade in species covered by the Convention must be authorized through a licensing system. Each Party to the Convention must designate one or more Management

Authorities in charge of administering that licensing system and one or more Scientific Authorities to advise them on the effects of trade on the status of the species. The species covered by CITES are listed in three Appendices, according to the degree of protection they need.

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