

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



Fifty-fourth meeting of the Standing Committee
Geneva (Switzerland), 2-6 October 2006

Interpretation and implementation of the Convention

Species trade and conservation issues

TIBETAN ANTELOPE

1. This document has been prepared by the Secretariat.

Background

2. At its 13th meeting (Bangkok, 2004), the Conference of the Parties adopted Resolution Conf. 11.8 (Rev. CoP13) (Conservation of and control of trade in the Tibetan antelope), in which it gives the following instructions.

DIRECTS:

- b) the Standing Committee to undertake a regular review of the enforcement measures taken by the Parties in eliminating the illicit trade in Tibetan antelope products on the basis of the Secretariat's report, and to report the results at each meeting of the Conference of the Parties.*

Related activities

3. On 22 November 2005, the Supreme Court of India issued an order containing, among other things, an instruction that persons found dealing in shahtoosh should be prosecuted. This order is directed at the authorities of the State of Jammu and Kashmir, which is where the majority of manufacturers using the wool of Tibetan antelope are based. The Secretariat hopes that this will assist in bringing such manufacture to a close. The Secretariat was pleased to note that, in reaching its decisions on this subject, the Supreme Court quoted from documents supplied by the Secretariat, particularly in relation to the mission it conducted to examine Tibetan antelope issues in China in 2003.
4. In document SC53 Doc. 21, the Secretariat advised the Standing Committee at its 53rd meeting (Geneva, June – July 2005) that the Government of India had established a committee to review the manufacture of shahtoosh in the State of Jammu and Kashmir. The Secretariat understands that this committee has completed its work. Reports in the media suggest that a recommendation of the committee is that India should consult with China with a view to establishing captive-breeding of the Tibetan antelope, so that a legal source of shahtoosh can be created. The Secretariat has written to the CITES Management Authority of India, seeking further information and has requested a copy of any report prepared by the committee.
5. The idea of captive-breeding of Tibetan antelope was discussed during the meeting of the CITES Tiger Enforcement Task Force in 2005. The Secretariat pointed out that, for wool produced from antelopes bred in captivity to be imported for commercial purposes, such an operation would require to be registered with the Secretariat in terms of Resolution Conf. 12.10 (Rev. CoP13) (Guidelines for a procedure to register and monitor operations that breed Appendix-I animals species for commercial

purposes). Additionally, since this species is only found in relatively small numbers in India, and only for a limited time each year, it is presumed that Tibetan antelopes would have to be imported to India from China. The current listing of the Tibetan antelope in Appendix I of the Convention means that such an import, being for other than a primarily non-commercial purpose, could not take place. It seems, therefore, that there is hardly any scope to engage in commercial activities related to Tibetan antelope in the near future. However, the Secretariat believes that the relevant authorities in China and India should consider discussing this issue, in case there is scope for such an approach to reduce the current pressure on the species.

Enforcement activities

6. The Secretariat is aware that the United Arab Emirates is one country that is continuing to seek out unlawful sales of shahtoosh shawls and has made significant seizures of such products. It is also aware that, in conducting such work, several countries have found the identification guide that was produced by the Metropolitan Police Service of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to be extremely useful. It wishes to remind Parties that details of the guide can be found in Notification to the Parties No. 2002/026 of 9 April 2002.
7. Thailand appears to be an important location for illicit trade in the wool of Tibetan antelope and there are several retail outlets in Bangkok. Some of these appear to have large stocks. Intelligence received by the Secretariat indicates that shahtoosh shawls are being sold to tourists visiting Bangkok and that they are popular among visitors from Japan. This intelligence has been passed to the authorities in Japan.
8. In the summer of 2003, a member of the Secretariat found shahtoosh shawls available in Bangkok and advised the Management Authority of Thailand. The Secretariat is not aware of any action having been taken, despite reminding the authorities of this matter. Problems of identification of Tibetan antelope wool are one reason provided for the lack of action. In early 2006, staff of TRAFFIC found large numbers of shahtoosh shawls available in Bangkok and informed the Management Authority. On this occasion, TRAFFIC was advised that Thailand's legislation did not allow the authorities to take action in the case of 'manufactured' products. The Secretariat has asked the CITES Management Authority of Thailand for more information on this aspect of its legislation. In May 2006, a member of the CITES Secretariat, accompanied by an officer of Interpol, who were in Bangkok for an enforcement-related meeting, found shahtoosh shawls available in a major shopping complex used by tourists. The CITES Management Authority of Thailand was provided with details of the shop and, on this occasion, assured the CITES Secretariat that action would be taken and that the lack of previous responses was due to confusion on the part of junior CITES officials.

Poaching

9. Illegal hunting of Tibetan antelope continues to be a serious problem. Aside from the organized poaching gangs that are a regular feature of illegal activities, recent studies have shown an apparently increased involvement of local nomadic tribes people, attracted by the high prices that skins can be sold for. Not being able to afford firearms, some of these people have taken to chasing Tibetan antelopes on motorbikes until the animals collapse through exhaustion. They are then killed with knives. An increase in the domestic sale of antelope heads and horns as decorative items has also been noted.

Final remarks

10. At the time of writing (July 2006) the Secretariat had no further information to report on the subject of Tibetan antelope. It is hoped, however, that more information, especially from India and Thailand, will be available by the time of the Standing Committee meeting. This species continues to suffer from considerable illegal harvesting and illicit trade and the law enforcement community must continue to target those involved in such activities.