

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



Sixty-sixth meeting of the Standing Committee
Geneva (Switzerland), 11-15 January 2016

Interpretation and implementation of the Convention

Species trade and conservation

Snake trade and conservation management

REPORT OF THE WORKING GROUP

1. This document has been prepared by Switzerland as Chair of the Standing Committee Working Group on Snake Trade and Conservation Management.*
2. At its 16th meeting (CoP16, Bangkok, 2013) the Conference of the Parties adopted a number of interconnected decisions on *Snake trade and conservation management (Serpentes spp.)* of which the following are relevant for the work of the Standing Committee.

Directed to the Standing Committee

16.105 *The Standing Committee shall:*

- a) *consider the reports and recommendations from the Animals Committee and the Secretariat provided in accordance with Decisions 16.102 and 16.103 and, as appropriate, the results of the ITC study on trade in python snakes in Asia, the UNCTAD Biotrade Initiative's Working Group on reptile skin sourcing, and any other relevant available information;*
- b) *examine the study undertaken by the UNCTAD Biotrade Initiative's Working Group on reptile skin sourcing, and any other relevant available information concerning:*
 - i) *the socio-economic implications of such a traceability system; and*
 - ii) *the potential costs of the system at all levels along the supply chain, from producers to consumers;*
- c) *make recommendations to the Parties, the Animals Committee and the Secretariat as appropriate; and*
- d) *report on the implementation of Decisions 16.102, 16.104 and 16.105 at CoP17, with recommendations for consideration by the Parties, if deemed necessary.*

Directed to the Parties

16.107 *In order to support the sustainable use of Asian snakes, Parties are as necessary invited to:*

* *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.*

- a) *in the case of range States with shared CITES-listed species in trade, develop comparable, or as far as possible standardized non-detriment finding methodologies, including the establishment of quota setting systems; and*
- b) *establish voluntary conservative annual catch and export quotas for CITES-listed snake species in trade, and to communicate the export quotas to the Secretariat.*

Directed to ICCWC and ASEAN-WEN

16.108 *The International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICCWC) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Wildlife Enforcement Network (ASEAN-WEN) are encouraged to take note of the concerns about the illegal and unreported trade in snakes and their parts and derivatives, and to take these into account when developing work programmes and, if funding is available, undertaking relevant activities.*

3. At its 65th meeting (SC65, Geneva, July 2014), the Standing Committee agreed that its Working Group on Snake Trade and Conservation Management would be continued, with the addition of Japan to its existing membership¹ and Switzerland as the Chair, and that the implementation of Decisions 16.102 to 16.108 would have to be further discussed at the 66th meeting of the Standing Committee (SC66).
4. This document will focus on the Decisions directed to the Standing Committee and the activities related to them.

Decision 16.105, paragraph a) (review of reports and recommendations)

5. The tasks assigned to the Standing Committee in Decision 16.105 relate to: (i) the revision of reports and recommendations from the Animals Committee and the Secretariat; (ii) reptile sourcing and traceability systems; (iii) the making of recommendations as appropriate; and (iv) reporting at the 17th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP17). They are briefly commented upon below.
6. Pursuant to Decision 16.103, paragraph a), the Animals Committee, at its 28th meeting (AC28, Tel Aviv, August 2015), reviewed the four studies and, based on this review, invited the Standing Committee to consider the drafting of a Resolution on the conservation, sustainable use of and trade in snakes based on the results achieved under different decision on snakes adopted at CoP16 to increase coherence, reduce duplication of effort and provide guidance to Parties that trade in snakes. The suggested draft of this resolution is found in Annex 1 to the present document.
7. The Animals Committee further invited the Standing Committee to draft a Decision on the conservation, sustainable use of, and trade in snakes, based on the information found in Annex 2 to the present document.
8. Concerning the studies on the commercial production of CITES-listed snake species in Viet Nam and China [Decision 16.102, paragraph a), i)] and on the impact of the pet trade on five snake species included in Appendix II [Decision 16.102, paragraph a), iii)], the Animals Committee invited the Standing Committee to:
 - a) recommend that Southeast Asian countries engaged in the snake trade endeavour to verify the origin of animals traded between countries in the region and to ensure the appropriate use of source codes;
 - b) encourage Honduras to ensure that measures are in place to address poaching of and illegal trade in the Cayos Cochinos boa constrictor (*Boa constrictor imperator*);
 - c) encourage Benin to implement the following measures for the Ball python (*Python regius*):
 - i) Design and implement a management program for the species;

¹ [The regional representatives of Asia (the Islamic Republic of Iran) and Europe (the United Kingdom) at the time the working group was formed; the regional representatives of Asia (Japan), Central and South America and the Caribbean (Colombia), Europe (Ukraine) and North America (the United States), and China, India, Indonesia, the Philippines, Switzerland, the European Union, IUCN, Animal Welfare Institute, Conservation International, Eurogroup for Animals, Humane Society International, International Alligator/Crocodile Trade Study, Pro Wildlife, SSN and TRAFFIC]

- ii) Make non-detriment findings based on studies of the species, basic demographics, harvest and trade in the species; and
 - iii) Strengthen national regulations relating to trade control and monitoring, including stricter control policies for production systems.
- d) encourage Ghana, Togo and Benin to implement the following measures for the Calabar ground boa (*Calabaria reinhardtii*):
- i) Make non-detriment findings based on studies of the species, basic demographics, harvest and trade in the species; and
 - ii) Improve systems to monitor harvest, captive breeding, and trade in the species.
- e) invite Indonesia to improve enforcement of existing laws and take into account the recommendations provided in the document to more effectively regulate the collection of and trade in the populations of the wild green tree python (*Morelia viridis*) and the Boelen's python (*Morelia boeleni*); and
- f) invite Parties affected by the above recommendations to report to the Standing Committee at its 69th meeting.
9. Concerning the study on methodologies for differentiating between wild and captive-bred CITES-listed snakes [Decision 16.102, paragraph a), iv)], the Animals Committee took note of the study and invited Parties to make use of the information contained in the study with a view to enhancing opportunities to better differentiate between wild and captive-bred CITES-listed snakes in trade. The Animals Committee further draws the attention of the Standing Committee to this study, as it may be important from an implementation and enforcement perspective.

Decision 16.105, paragraph b) (reptile sourcing and traceability systems)

10. The International Trade Centre (ITC) study on trade in python snakes in Asia (Kasterine, A., Arbeid, R., Caillabet, O. and Natusch, D. 2012. *The Trade in South-East Asian Python Skins*) can be found at <http://www.intracen.org/The-Trade-in-South-East-Asian-Python-Skin/>. The study emanating from United Nations Conference on Trade and Development's (UNCTAD) Biotrade Initiative Working Group on reptile skin sourcing (Ashley, D. 2013. *Traceability Systems for a Sustainable International Trade in South-East Asian Python Skins*) can be downloaded from the UNCTAD Biotrade webpage (www.biotrade.org/Additional_Resources_VC.html). Other relevant information can be found in document AC27 Doc. 19.4.
11. Relevant information and recommendations are also contained in the four studies on the snake trade and conservation management discussed above, and in a document on a global traceability information system for reptile skins, submitted at AC28 by Italy and Mexico (see document AC28 Doc. 14.2.2).
12. At its 27th meeting (AC27, Veracruz, 2014), the Animals Committee made initial recommendations on the feasibility, development and implementation of a traceability system for snakes [see document AC27 WG4 Doc. 1 (Rev. 1)]. In support of the implementation of Decision 16.105, these recommendations were reported to the Standing Committee at its 65th meeting (SC65, Geneva, July 2014) as follows (see document SC65 Doc. 44):
- a) Concerning stockpiles, the Animals Committee made the following recommendations in view of the problems related to large stockpiles of python skins in South-East Asian countries:
 - The Standing Committee may consider recommending that such stockpiles be inventoried and tagged by the countries concerned, and that this information be provided to the Secretariat as a baseline before any traceability system is implemented;
 - The inventory should contain information on the species concerned, the stage of processing of the skins (crust, dried, etc.), and the corresponding quantities and tag numbers; and
 - The Standing Committee may also wish to consider how such stockpiles may enter into international trade; and

- b) Concerning traceability, the Animals Committee suggested that the Standing Committee consider implementing a traceability system for snake skins comprising the following characteristics:
- For the formulation of relevant provisions, the Standing Committee may draw upon Resolution Conf. 11.12 (Rev. CoP15) on *Universal tagging system for the identification of crocodilian skins* as a template;
 - In particular, the traceability systems should commence as close to the point of harvest of the animal or production of the skin as possible. It should be made mandatory up to and including finished skins. Any use of the tagging information further on in the trade chain is optional; and
 - The identification of skins should make use of devices that are tamper proof, affordable, uniquely serially numbered and contain the following minimum information: species, country of origin (where relevant regional code), year of harvest or production, unique serial number, source code. In addition, Parties are encouraged to add other information they deem necessary.
13. At SC65, the Standing Committee took note of these recommendations, acknowledging that its working group on snake trade and conservation management would further consider the matter of snake skin traceability and sourcing intersessionally and report at the 66th meeting of the Standing Committee.
14. In the intersessional period between AC28 and the present meeting, the Working Group did not have sufficient time to thoroughly discuss the results of all the studies relevant to this topic that were presented at that AC28. It is therefore not able to make specific recommendations at this time.
15. The Working Group acknowledges that traceability systems for CITES-listed species will be discussed more generally under agenda item 34 of the present meeting. The results of these discussions may provide further guidance to the Working Group and the Standing Committee for implementing Decision 16.105.

Decision 16.105, paragraphs c) and d) (recommendations and reporting on decisions)

16. The documents and studies produced under Decisions 16.102 and 16.103 contain a relatively large number of recommendations which should be evaluated by the Standing Committee. However, the Working Group did not have the time to undertake a complete overview and analysis of these recommendations.

Decision 16.107

17. Decision 16.107 is directed to the Parties that trade in Asian snakes. The Working Group has so far not obtained information on the implementation of this Decision.

Decision 16.108

18. Decision 16.108 is directed to the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICWC) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Wildlife Enforcement Network (ASEAN-WEN). In accordance with its mandate, the Standing Committee Working Group on Snake Trade and Conservation Management could evaluate whether implementation of this Decision has been initiated and how it is progressing, for example through its Asian members or the Representatives of the Asian region of the Standing Committee.
19. The Secretariat reported to the Working Group that upon its recommendation on behalf of ICCWC², snakes and their parts and derivatives were included as targets for Operation COBRA II³ and Operation COBRA III⁴, two one month-long global operations to combat illegal wildlife trade, which ended on 27 January 2014 and 27 May 2015, respectively. The operations significantly supported the implementation of Decision 16.108. Operation COBRA II resulted in several seizures of snake specimens, including a substantial seizure of 1,254 snakes, as reported in document SC65 Doc. 44. Operation COBRA III resulted in 18 seizures of snake specimens, making snakes the sixth largest group of species illegally traded during the operation (out of 44 groups of species in total).

² <http://www.cites.org/eng/prog/ICCWC.php>

³ http://cites.org/eng/news/sundry/2014/20140210_operation_cobra_ii.php

⁴ http://cites.org/eng/news/pr/iccwc_press_release_cobra_III

20. The Working Group has not received further information concerning the implementation of Decision 16.108.

Recommendations

21. The Standing Committee is invited to note this document, and the status of implementation of Decisions 16.105, 16.107 and 16.108 reported therein. The Chair of the Standing Committee Working Group on Snake trade and conservation management will provide an oral update on further progress made.

22. The oral report will mainly deal with the recommendations from the Working Group in relation to the various recommendations by the Animals Committee mentioned in paragraphs 8 to 12 above.

23. In accordance with Decision 16.105, the Standing Committee is in particular invited to:

- a) consider the reports and recommendations from the Animals Committee and the Secretariat provided in accordance with Decisions 16.102 and 16.103;
- b) consider the draft resolution contained in Annex 1 to this document, as proposed by the Animals Committee, make its own additions and decide on its submission to CoP17;
- c) consider the drafting of decisions to be submitted to CoP17, taking into account the comments from the Animals Committee contained in Annex 2 of this document; and
- d) consider how it wishes the Working Group on Snake trade and conservation to continue its work, and how it wishes to report to CoP17 in compliance with Decision 16.105.

Resolution on the conservation, sustainable use of and trade in snakes

AWARE that certain species of snakes are successfully bred in captivity, collected from the wild and traded in high numbers in and outside range States, *inter alia* to supply the demand for use as food, skins, traditional medicine, and for the pet trade;

AWARE that the harvesting of snakes, and in the case of some species the initial processing of their skins and other body parts, is of economic importance and contributes important revenue to local communities;

ACKNOWLEDGING that unregulated or unsustainable trade in snakes can pose significant threats to wild populations, and that international cooperation is needed to address these threats urgently;

OBSERVING that the collection of snakes is carried out through an extensive informal network of trappers, hunters and middlemen, and that collection efforts and trade volumes are considerable, especially in Asia;

ACKNOWLEDGING Resolution Conf. 10.16 (Rev.) on Specimens of animal species bred in captivity

ACKNOWLEDGING Resolution Conf. 12.10 (Rev. CoP15) on the Registration of operations that breed Appendix-I animal species in captivity for commercial purposes

NOTING Resolution Conf. 14.7 (Rev. CoP15) on Management of nationally established export quotas

NOTING Resolution Conf. 16.7 on NDFs and its concepts and non-binding guiding principles in considering whether trade would be detrimental to the survival of a species.

THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE CONVENTION

Regarding non-detriment findings (NDF)

ENCOURAGES range States that wish to export species of snakes listed in Appendix II to make use of available guidance, in particular the results of the Cancun workshop on NDFs in 2008, for making non-detriment findings for trade in snakes of wild origin, and guidance on other species as appropriate.

ENCOURAGES also Parties and stakeholders in snake conservation, sustainable use and trade to share their experiences and lessons learned with regard to making NDFs.

DIRECTS Parties and the Secretariat to use the snake NDF guidance and its updates in capacity-building workshops and relevant training materials;

Regarding management of wild snake populations

ENCOURAGES Parties to establish national harvest and trade policies for snake species;

INVITES Parties to identify those snake species that are impacted by international trade and, where appropriate, propose possible CITES listings and implement national management strategies including establishment of export and harvest quotas, size or season restrictions, among others, to further conservation of the species concerned;

ENCOURAGES all Parties to explore ways to enhance the participation of the private sector in the conservation of and sustainable use and trade in snake species;

ENCOURAGES Parties and stakeholders to increase public awareness of the ecosystem services provided by snakes, of the benefits and consequences of non-detrimental and legal trade and the threats to the survival of the species in the wild and livelihoods posed by illegal trade in snakes and their parts and derivatives;

Regarding monitoring and trade controls

ENCOURAGES Parties to use guidance developed for monitoring wild populations and controlling captive-breeding operations and other production systems;

ENCOURAGES also Parties and stakeholders in snake conservation and trade to share their experiences and lessons learned with regard to the application of guidance developed for monitoring and controlling captive-breeding operations and other production systems.

ENCOURAGES range States to apply methodologies for differentiating wild and captive-bred specimens of CITES-listed snakes in trade;

URGES Parties to enhance and increase enforcement efforts with regard to existing legislation as a matter of urgency;

URGES Parties with trade in snake parts and derivatives to enhance efforts to better regulate such trade;

URGES Parties to enhance cooperation amongst wildlife-law enforcement agencies at national and international levels concerning control of trade in snakes, and between enforcement agencies and national CITES authorities;

ENCOURAGES Parties to test, and consider the introduction of innovative traceability and enforcement methods in range and consumer States and, as a matter of priority, to strengthen enforcement efforts;

URGES Parties that have snake captive-breeding or ranching facilities in their territories to engage in regular monitoring of such facilities, taking into account the origin of parental stock and whether they were obtained legally and without detriment to wild populations, as well as the practicality and capacity of producing the offspring claimed and for those facilities that breed Appendix I species to register those facilities with the CITES Secretariat in accordance with Resolution Conf. 12.10 (Rev. CoP15).

URGES Parties to pursue the development and dissemination of forensic methods to assist Parties in the identification of snake parts and derivatives, and for examination of products labelled as containing parts and derivatives of snakes;

Regarding traceability systems for snake skins

Encourages Parties to share experiences in the use of traceability systems for specimens of CITES-listed snakes, including the use of identification technologies;

Encourages Parties to take into account lessons learned from projects on traceability implemented for other CITES-listed species

RECOMMENDS

- a) The traceability systems should commence as close to the point of harvest of the animal or production of the skin as possible. It should be made mandatory up to and including finished skins.;
- b) The identification of skins should make use of devices that are tamper proof, affordable, uniquely serially numbered and contain the following minimum information: species, country of origin (where relevant regional code), year of harvest or production, unique serial number, source code or technologies that may accomplish the same requirements. In addition, Parties are encouraged to add other information they deem necessary;
- c) The Secretariat should compile such information on available identification technologies and projects to make them available to Parties;
- d) CALLS UPON governments and intergovernmental organizations, international aid agencies, non-governmental organizations, the industry and other donors to provide financial support and other assistance to implement this Resolution;
- e) Encourages Parties to engage in the development of traceability systems and to explore ways to enhance the participation of the private sector and other stakeholders in this process.

In support of the draft resolution contained in Annex 1, the Animals Committee invited the Standing Committee to draft a decision on the conservation, sustainable use of and trade in snakes that contains the following elements:

Encourages the Standing Committee and Animals Committee to:

- a) Review information on the conservation, sustainable use of and trade in snakes, particularly information on non-detriment findings;
- b) Instruct the Secretariat to make this information available through the CITES website; and
- c) Recommend revisions to Resolution Conf. 17.XX on the conservation, sustainable use of and trade in snakes in light of this new information as necessary.