

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



Seventy-third meeting of the Standing Committee
Online, 5-7 May 2021

Administrative and financial matters

Report on current activities of the scientific committees

ANIMALS COMMITTEE

1. This document has been submitted by the Chair of the Animals Committee.*
2. In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic and following extensive deliberations between the Chairs and members of the Standing, Animals and Plants Committees and the Secretariat, it was confirmed that the face-to-face 31st meeting (AC31) of the Animals Committee would not take place as scheduled from 13-17 July (see Notification to the Parties [No. 2020/045](#) of 29 May 2020).
3. On the basis of the documents prepared for its 31st meeting, the Secretariat, at the instruction of the Chair of the Animals Committee, initiated a procedure for intersessional decision-making in accordance with Rule 19 [**Procedure for intersessional decision-making**] of the Rules of Procedure of the Animals Committee.
4. The Animals Committee took the following intersessional decisions, which were published in Notification to the Parties [No. 2020/057](#) of 22 September 2020:
 - a) Mr. Mathias Lörtscher (Representative for the European region) and Mr. Hugh Robertson (Representative for the Oceanian region) were confirmed as Chair and Vice-Chair of the Animals Committee respectively;
 - b) The Animals Committee workplan for 2020-2022 (from CoP18 to CoP19), as outlined in document [AC31 Doc. 7.2](#), was approved;
 - c) Ms. Cecilia Lougheed (alternate representative for the North American region) was nominated as the Animals Committee representative on the Standing Committee working group on capacity-building; and
 - d) The scope of the work on marine ornamental fishes, envisaged in Decisions 18.296 to 18.298, was confirmed to be as outlined in paragraph 3 of document [AC31 Doc. 36](#), i.e. international trade in non-CITES listed live coral reef fishes, and those species (including sharks and rays) that are caught and traded for display in public or private aquariums.
5. The Committee also established six intersessional working groups and agreed their Terms of Reference. Details of the mandates and membership of each working group can be found [here](#).

* *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.*

6. The Animals Committee remained committed to making progress on its mandate in spite of the challenges it faced due to Covid-19 measures. The members met virtually on Friday 27 November in two 2-hour sessions to agree on a roadmap for intersessional work for 2020 and 2021. The roadmap was developed working towards a meeting of the Animals Committee in May or early June 2021, while anticipating Standing Committee meetings in April and September 2021, and the 19th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP19) in March 2022.
7. In addition to the six formal working groups, the Animals Committee agreed that several items of its workplan could benefit from informal discussions between members and invited experts who could be consulted on an *ad hoc* basis (e.g. when a study or report became available for review). The general view was that this could facilitate and speed up proper discussions and decision-making at the single Animals Committee meeting to take place between CoP18 and CoP19. The topics include: Appendix-I listed species; Non-detriment Findings; sturgeons and paddlefish; amphibians; eels; sharks and rays; seahorses; pangolins; songbirds; Banggai cardinalfish; Saiga antelope; queen conch; tortoises and freshwater turtles; and marine ornamental fishes. The AC workplan indicates who of the AC members are in the lead for discussions on these items. The results of these informal discussions are expected to vary on a case-by-case basis. They could take the form of a written output or an information document, support to the Secretariat in the production of an update, or a verbal contribution, depending on timing and the progress made intersessionally.
8. Some items that involve consultation with the members of the Committee through the Chair [i.e. consultations under paragraph k) of Resolution Conf. 12.8 (Rev. CoP18) on *Review of Significant Trade in specimens of Appendix-II species*, and Resolution Conf. 17.7 (Rev. CoP18) on *Review of trade in animal specimens reported as produced in captivity*] will take place as outlined in the relevant Resolutions. Concerning the selection of new species/country combinations under both of these processes, it was decided that no new cases would be selected for review in the event of a virtual meeting scenario. The next round of cases selected for review will occur at the first meeting of the Animals Committee after CoP19, in line with the process and timeline set out in the Resolutions concerned.
9. While the general consensus between the Animals Committee members was that ideally a face-to-face meeting would be preferable, it was recognized that it would not be possible in the current circumstances, as a significant number of members would be unlikely to be in a position to travel to such a meeting in 2021.
10. A second informal virtual meeting of the Animals Committee members was held on 2 March 2021 to discuss what progress has been made with the implementation of the roadmap, and the arrangements for holding the rescheduled 31st meeting of the Animals Committee on-line, which will now take place in June 2021, the precise dates of which will be notified in a Notification to the Parties.
11. In early 2020, the Animals Committee was further consulted whether a transfer of live elephant specimens from an Appendix II population to an ex-situ location could be considered “an exceptional circumstance” and would provide demonstrable in-situ conservation benefits for African elephants as outlined in Resolution Conf. 18.2 Annex 2, paragraphs a) and f) on the *definition of appropriate and acceptable destinations*. In accordance with Resolution Conf. 12.10 (Rev. CoP15), Annex 2, paragraph 3, the Animals Committee also commented on an objection raised by a party to CITES on a registration to breed *Falco pelegrinoides* and *Falco peregrinus* for commercial purposes. Finally, under paragraph a) of Decision 18.133, the Animals Committees provided input to assist the Secretariat in identifying priorities for additional or improved NDF guidance materials, and for addressing apparent gaps or needs on document AC31 Doc. 14.1.
12. The Nomenclature Specialist of the Animals Committee has worked to progress on the nomenclatural tasks assigned to the Animals Committee by CoP18, under Decisions 17.312 (Rev. CoP18), 18.309 to 18.312. Draft documents on all these topics were prepared and posted on the CITES website by the original document submission deadline for AC31, i.e. May 2020. After the deferral of AC31 from its originally scheduled dates, an inter-sessional working group on nomenclatural matters was established in January 2021 and has been working its way through the assigned tasks, on track for preparing a working group recommendations document and updated working documents for AC31's re-scheduled dates in June 2021. In addition, the Nomenclature Specialist has provided advice on nomenclatural matters to the Secretariat and Parties on matters emerging in the course of implementation of the Convention against the background of progressive scientific understanding of animal taxonomy and nomenclature.

13. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the members of the Animals Committee for their willingness to adapt and show flexibility in taking the important mandates of the Committee forward in such challenging circumstances. We have developed and are implementing an extremely ambitious intersessional work programme so that we can provide useful inputs to the discussions that will take place at the 74th meeting of the Standing Committee in September and at CoP19. I also would like to thank the staff of the CITES Secretariat for their immense work and tireless support in these very unusual and challenging times.