

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



Seventeenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties  
Johannesburg (South Africa), 24 September – 5 October 2016

Species specific matters

Asian big cats (Felidae spp.)

PROPOSAL OF INDIA

1. This document has been submitted by India.\*

Background

2. India is home to almost two thirds of the world's wild tiger population. Project Tiger, the Central Government scheme launched in 1973, has overseen an increase from 9 tiger reserves in its formative years, to 49 tiger reserves across 18 states in the country today. A number of conservation measures, including strict laws which prohibit all trade in tiger parts and derivatives from all sources, incentivized voluntary relocation of human settlements and scientific best practices for monitoring wild tigers, has seen a rise in the wild tiger population in India from an estimated 1411 in 2006 to 2226 in 2014.
3. India monitors its wild tiger population through an intensive and rigorous process. The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) and the Wildlife Institute of India (WII), in collaboration with State Forest Departments and national conservation NGOs, conducts a countrywide assessment of the status of tigers, co-predators, prey and their habitat every four years. As part of this assessment, a remote camera based capture-recapture technique for estimating tiger abundance is used. Tiger photographs obtained from camera traps are digitized and analyzed using the program *Extract Compare*, a pattern recognition program specially developed to individually identify tigers from their striped coat pattern.
4. As part of the 2014 tiger population assessment, a total of 3,78,118 square kilometers of forests in 18 states were surveyed, and this unprecedented effort in camera trapping tigers resulted in a total of 1685 unique tiger photo-captures. All in all, since the inception and use of this technology for monitoring tiger populations, as of March 2016, NTCA/ WII has a database of over 2000 wild tigers from India, and from Nepal and Bangladesh as well, which can be uniquely identified from their striped coat pattern as well as the coordinates of their photo-captures.
5. The software used to identify individual tigers by their stripe patterns can also be used to support law enforcement. If a photograph of the stripe pattern of a seized tiger skin or carcass is compared with the database of photo-captured tigers and a match is found, it establishes the identity of the tiger which was poached, and the locations the tiger was known to have frequented.
6. Such information is extremely valuable from an enforcement point of view. It has the potential to throw light on the illegal trade in tigers all the way from where poaching is occurring, to the routes used for smuggling skins, to the ultimate destination for illegal skins. Apart from its usefulness in an individual case, such information, when collated and analyzed, can be used to tailor national, regional, and international enforcement responses. As a simple example, it can indicate the areas where tigers are unsafe and more

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\* *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.*

patrolling is required. Additionally, the process does not require the sharing of any sensitive information, only photographs of seized skins, taken from above with the skin spread. Alternately, in the case of whole tiger carcasses seized with the skin intact, photographs of both sides of the carcass can be shared.

7. This technology is already being used within India, and between India and Nepal. Images of seized tiger skins are being sent to the Wildlife Institute of India for identification. From the beginning of 2016 till April, ten skins from three different seizures (in India and Nepal) were compared and five were matched to tiger images in the database.
8. At its 65<sup>th</sup> meeting, the Standing Committee adopted a recommendation encouraging “Parties to share images of seized tiger skins with range States with photographic identification databases so as to assist in the identification of the origin of the illegal specimen.”<sup>1</sup>
9. At its 66<sup>th</sup> meeting, the Standing Committee adopted a recommendation encouraging Parties that have started DNA registration, photographic identification, and other types of identification databases of captive Asian big cats to share the available information with relevant countries, upon request, for law enforcement purposes and encouraging the Secretariat and Parties with financial resources and technical expertise to assist, through in-country activities, Parties that have yet to establish national registries or identification databases for Asian big cats to do so.<sup>2</sup>

#### Recommendation

10. In light of the above, India proposes that in addition to adopting the draft decisions on Asian big cats proposed by the Standing Committee at its 66<sup>th</sup> meeting, the Conference of the Parties also adopt the following decisions:

#### **Directed to the Secretariat**

17.xx *The Secretariat shall by notification:*

- a) *request the tiger range states to inform the Secretariat whether they have photographic identification databases for tigers, and the capacity to identify tigers from photographs of tiger skins, and if so, the contacts of the relevant National focal points or agencies; and*
- b) *inform the Parties which tiger range states have photographic identification databases for tigers, and the capacity to identify tigers from photographs of tiger skins, and the contacts of the relevant National focal points or agencies.*

#### **Directed to the Parties**

- 17.xx *All Parties which henceforth make seizures of tiger skins should share images of seized tiger skins with the National focal points or agencies of tiger range states which have photographic identification databases for tigers, and the capacity to identify tigers from photographs of tiger skins, so as to identify the origin of illegal specimens. The image should be taken from above with the skin spread. In the case of whole tiger carcasses seized with the skin intact, images of both sides of the carcass should be shared.*
- 17.xx *Parties are encouraged to share images of tiger skins seized in the past up till the year 2006 where such images are available or can be acquired if the seized specimens have not been destroyed. The image should be taken from above with the skin spread. In the case of whole tiger carcasses seized with the skin intact, images of both sides of the carcass can be shared.*
- 17.xx *Parties sharing images under Decisions 17xx, and 17xx with tiger range states shall keep the Secretariat informed of such exchanges. Tiger range states making successful identifications based on shared images shall keep the Secretariat informed of such identifications.*

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<sup>1</sup> SC65 Com. 4, available at <<https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/com/sc/65/com/E-SC65-Com-04.pdf>>, and Notification No. 2015/006, available at <<https://cites.org/sites/default/files/notif/E-Notif%202015-006.pdf>>.

<sup>2</sup> SC66 Com. 11, available at <<https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/com/sc/66/Com/E-SC66-Com-11.pdf>>.

### **Directed to the Secretariat**

17.xx *The Secretariat shall report on the implementation of Decisions 17.xx to 17xx to the 69<sup>th</sup> and 70<sup>th</sup> meetings of the Standing Committee and the 18<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Conference of the Parties.*

### **Directed to the Parties**

17.xx *All Parties, and tiger range states in particular, are encouraged to consider and work towards an International database / repository on tiger photo-captures as well as seized tiger skins, maintained by a single agency, which could be updated regularly based on the population monitoring and enforcement work carried out by the Parties. Such a project could be undertaken by international conservation organization such as the Global Tiger Forum.*

### COMMENTS FROM THE SECRETARIAT

- A. Photographic identification databases for tigers is an important tool for law enforcement efforts. The benefits of such databases is evident, and the present document notes that “From the beginning of 2016 till April, ten skins from three different seizures (in India and Nepal) were compared and five were matched to tiger images in the database”.
- B. This is also relevant to the provisions of Resolution Conf. 12.5 (Rev. CoP16) on *Conservation of and trade in tigers and other Appendix-I Asian big cat species*, which URGES:
- d) *all range States and other relevant Parties to implement systems for the recording of information relating to illegal trade in Asian big cats and to share this information as appropriate to ensure coordinated investigations and enforcement;*

Resolution Conf. 12.5 (Rev. CoP16) RECOMMENDS that:

- a) *the range States of the tiger and other Asian big cat species ensure that [...] intelligence is shared between relevant enforcement agencies to counter illegal killing and trade;*

Resolution Conf. 12.5 (Rev. CoP16) further REQUESTS:

- a) *countries and organizations with the relevant expertise to encourage and support range and consumer States, as a matter of urgency, in the development of practical identification manuals to aid the detection and accurate identification of parts and derivatives of Asian big cats;*

- C. The recommendations adopted by the Standing Committee at its 65th<sup>3</sup> and 66th<sup>4</sup> meetings (SC65, Geneva, July 2014; SC66, Geneva, January 2016), strongly encouraged Parties to, among others, increasingly draw upon photographic identification databases in support of law enforcement.
- D. The Secretariat recommends that the Conference of the Parties adopt the draft decisions presented in paragraph 10 of the present document, with the exception of the first draft decision 17.xx under *Directed to the Parties*, which the Secretariat recommends to be incorporated in Resolution Conf. 12.5 (Rev. CoP16). The Secretariat recommends that Resolution Conf. 12.5 (Rev. CoP16) be revised, by inserting the following text as paragraph k) under URGES:
- k. all Parties that make seizures of tiger skins within their territories, to share images of the seized tiger skins with the national focal points or agencies in tiger range States, which have photographic identification databases for tigers, and the capacity to identify tigers from photographs of tiger skins, so as to identify the origin of illegal specimens. The images should be taken from above with the skin spread. In the case of whole tiger carcasses seized with the skin intact, images should be taken of both sides of the carcass.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/com/sc/65/com/E-SC65-Com-04.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/com/sc/66/Com/E-SC66-Com-11.pdf>

E. The decisions directed to the Secretariat can be accommodated within its regular work programme.