

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



Eighteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties
Colombo (Sri Lanka), 23 May – 3 June 2019

Species specific matters

CONSERVATION OF THE TITICACA WATER FROG
(*TELMATOBIUS CULEUS*)

1. This document has been submitted by Peru.*

Background

2. The Titicaca water frog (*Telmatobius culeus*) is an endemic species to Lake Titicaca and its adjacent water bodies, which are shared by Peru and the Plurinational State of Bolivia. The few records of wild individuals documented in the last few years show that its natural populations are declining because of current threats.
3. Over the last decade, its populations have been affected mainly by habitat pollution as well as illegal hunting and harvesting for consumption and trade in the domestic and international market. Because of this, the species has been included in Appendix I of the CITES Convention since 2016.
4. There are currently binational efforts under way to conserve the biological diversity of Lake Titicaca, which contributes to alleviate the pressure on the populations of the species in both countries. However, illegal trade of frogs and habitat pollution continue to threaten the survival of the species in the short and medium term.
5. The Titicaca water frog is protected in Peru by Supreme Decree No. 004-2014-MINAGRI, which approves the update of the classification and categorization list of legally protected endangered wildlife species. The species is classified as Critically Endangered in this list.
6. In Peru, several protected areas have been identified and established in which populations of the Titicaca water frog are present. The main examples are Reserva Nacional del Titicaca and the Ramsar Site with the same name. Population monitoring, environmental education and ecotourism activities take place there.
7. In addition, Peru has a National Strategy to Reduce Wildlife Trafficking (approved by Supreme Decree No. 011-2017-MINAGRI on 14 August 2018) and is conducting actions for its implementation, including demand-reduction campaigns, identification of trafficking areas and routes, and scaling up of law enforcement and seizure activities.
8. In this context, the need to articulate international efforts to combat the threats faced by this flagship species shared by both countries has been recognized. Hence, since 2016 priority has been given to actions aimed at promoting the conservation of the Titicaca water frog by the Peru-Bolivia Binational Ministerial Cabinets. Thanks to this binational effort, the “Binational Action Plan for the Conservation of the Titicaca Water Frog (*Telmatobius culeus*) and the Titicaca Grebe (*Rollandia microptera*)” was drawn up and approved jointly in

* 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.

2018. The Plan provides for the development of priority actions to improve the conservation status of these species and the generation of alternatives for the sustainable development of local populations.

9. The Plurinational State of Bolivia recognizes the right of other living beings to develop in a normal and permanent way in Article 33 of its Public Constitution. In fact, the Titicaca water frog and all other wildlife are considered gifts from Mother Earth and the natural heritage of the Bolivian people, in accordance with Act No. 300.
10. It is forbidden to hunt and capture specimens of Titicaca water frog in the Plurinational State of Bolivia, in accordance with Article 9, paragraph II of Supreme Decree No. 3048, which restricts the hunting and use of wildlife specimens included in CITES Appendix I.
11. The Government of the Plurinational State of Bolivia is currently implementing actions aimed at the protection of the Titicaca water frog. Since 2017 it is jointly coordinating with Peru the implementation of the project entitled "Integrated Water Resources Management in the Titicaca-Desaguadero-Poopo-Salar de Coipasa (TDPS) System", which includes research and environmental education activities as well as the development of strategies for the conservation of the ecosystems that comprise the habitat of the Titicaca water frog. For this reason, the species has been considered a priority by this project as an indicator species of the conservation status of Lake Titicaca.
12. The academic sector, including universities, research institutes, natural history museums and NGOs, has been generating scientific information about the biology, ecology and conservation status of the species, which makes it possible to make informed decisions for its conservation.

Recommendations

13. In order to contribute to the conservation of this flagship species by reducing and/or ending its demand and/or illegal trade, we urge the Parties to implement the following actions:
 - a) Recognize the Titicaca water frog as one of the flagship species of Lake Titicaca (a UNESCO World Heritage Site) so that the protection and conservation of the species and its habitats become a joint responsibility.
 - b) Strengthen cross-border control between the Parties, increasing preventive actions and controls at the entry and exit points of goods and baggage, and also intelligence work to reduce illegal trade of specimens of Titicaca water frog.
 - c) Adopt any measures and actions that may be necessary to raise awareness among citizens about the plight of the species and the need to maintain the quality of its habitats.
 - d) Increase outreach efforts about the importance of the conservation of the Titicaca giant frog and its habitats and also about the existing regulations and penalties aimed at controlling illegal trade of specimens of the species.
 - e) Develop technical and management tools to promote the recovery of populations of the species.
 - f) Generate and exchange information about the status of the populations of Titicaca water frog, its habitats and the effects of current threats.
 - g) Manage and strengthen cooperation mechanisms on a local, national and regional level in order to promote best practices in the management of the aquatic ecosystems where the species occurs; channel investments to the conservation and monitoring of the TDPS system, reduce existing threats and strengthen the capabilities of the main players involved in the conservation of the species and its habitats.
14. We recommend that the Conference of the Parties adopt the draft resolution included in Annex I to the present document.

COMMENTS OF THE SECRETARIAT

- A. Document CoP18 Doc. 87, submitted by Peru, calls for the adoption of a dedicated resolution on the conservation of *Telmatobius culeus* (Titicaca water frog), a species which was listed in Appendix I at CoP17 (entering into effect on 2 January 2017). The authors do not discuss the impacts of this recent inclusion of the species in CITES, or what measures the two range States of the species, the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Peru, took to implement this listing, but state that wild populations of *T. culeus* are undergoing declines associated with habitat pollution and illegal hunting and capture for consumption, as well as for national and international trade.
- B. Document CoP18 Doc. 87 does not provide referenced evidence for the stated continuous decline of *T. culeus*, or the role of trade therein. The impact of international trade on the conservation status of this species, if any, therefore remains unclear, as the Secretariat had already observed in its assessment of the proposal to list the species in Appendix I at CoP17 (see document [CoP17 Doc.88.1 Annex 2A](#)).
- C. The assessment by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) that is quoted in the preamble of the proposed resolution in Annex 1 states that “the Titicaca water frog has been categorized as Critically Endangered in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species since 2004”. However, the Secretariat observes that the last assessment of this species by IUCN dates back from 2004, and is marked as ‘in need of updating’ by the assessors.
- D. The Secretariat notes that several of the measures in paragraph 1 of the draft resolution are beyond the scope of the Convention, relating to non-CITES specific conservation concerns or to domestic policies (such as, for example, requirements relating to reducing illegal hunting, capture and national trade; prohibiting the sale and acquisition of specimens; increasing awareness on the conservation of the species). These and other measures that are relevant to the two range States of the species, such as increasing information exchange concerning the status of populations and developing and strengthening national and international cooperation to support the conservation of the species, can best be addressed through direct, bilateral cooperation between the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Peru.
- E. The activities proposed in paragraph 2 of the draft resolution, involving the Secretariat, in collaboration with the Animals and Standing Committees (i.e. cooperating with Parties to develop and implement measures to support the conservation of *T. culeus*; and facilitating the exchange of information on illegal trade) would also better be addressed to, and implemented by the two range States themselves through improved bilateral collaboration.
- F. Document CoP18 Doc. 87 does not provide evidence suggesting that the implementation of the current listing of the species in Appendix I, which already confers it the highest possible degree of protection under CITES, is insufficient or would need to be strengthened in a resolution. Given that this species was only listed in the CITES Appendices in 2017, information on the conservation and trade impacts of this listing are also probably still unavailable.
- G. On the basis of the considerations above, the Secretariat is of the opinion that it is premature to consider a species-specific resolution on the Titicaca water frog. The Secretariat therefore recommends that the draft resolution in Annex 1 to document CoP18 Doc. 87 not be adopted.
- H. The Secretariat is of the view that the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Peru, as the only two range States of *T. culeus*, could be encouraged to work bilaterally to exchange information on the conservation status of their populations, monitor trends, and address threats posed by illegal international trade.

DRAFT RESOLUTION OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES

Conservation of the Titicaca water frog (*Telmatobius culeus*)

RECALLING that the Titicaca water frog (*Telmatobius culeus*) is included in Appendix I of the Convention and that all international trade in its parts and derivatives has been regulated by the Convention since 2016;

RECOGNIZING that the Titicaca water frog has a major cultural importance for the local communities of Peru and Bolivia and is also the largest amphibian of the highest navigable lake in the world;

AWARE that the Titicaca water frog is vulnerable to persecution for illegal trade, as evidenced by the continuous seizures of hundreds of individuals by law enforcement authorities in its range States;

NOTING that the Titicaca water frog has been classified as Critically Endangered in the IUCN Red List since 2004 and that since then the threats to the species remain present, such as the pollution of the aquatic ecosystems where it occurs and the persecution of most of its populations, which could lead the species to become extinct in the near future;

NOTING WITH CONCERN that illegal trade and the capture of individuals have persisted in recent years due to the demand in the black market for their consumption for medicinal purposes, and that coordinated efforts by countries are required to prevent an increase in the species' risk of extinction;

AWARE that law enforcement and control of poaching and illegal trade as well as awareness raising about this problem, education and reduction of the demand and also cooperation with local communities are essential for the effective conservation of the species;

NOTING the initiatives taken by Peru and Bolivia to conserve their wildlife, generate information about it, reduce its illegal trade and combat poaching of the species; and

RECOGNIZING that cooperation between all the relevant Parties – including range States – to strengthen control and conservation measures for the species as well as financial support will contribute to a more effective conservation of the Titicaca water frog;

THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE CONVENTION

1. URGES all the Parties, particularly range States and countries with demand of Titicaca water frog specimens, to:
 - a) recognize the Titicaca water frog as one of the flagship species of Lake Titicaca so that the protection and conservation of the species and its habitats becomes a joint responsibility;
 - b) urgently adopt comprehensive enforcement controls aimed at eliminating the poaching of individuals and trade in their parts and derivatives;
 - c) prohibit the sale and acquisition – including online sales – of live specimens and parts and derivatives of the Titicaca water frog in the countries of the region;
 - d) strengthen the law enforcement and control efforts under way, eliminating gaps in legislation;
 - e) establish a cross-border cooperation network between range States to strengthen the comprehensive management of the ecosystems in which the species occurs and reinforce law enforcement controls, including measures against poaching;
 - f) increase awareness-raising and outreach actions about the importance of conserving the Titicaca water frog and its habitats as well as the need to eliminate demand for the species and promote awareness of applicable regulations;

- g) increase the generation and exchange of information about the status of populations of Titicaca water frog, its habitats and the effects of current threats; and
 - h) develop and strengthen cooperation mechanisms on a local, national and regional level to improve good conservation practices in the aquatic ecosystems of the Peruvian-Bolivian high plateau, channel investments to the conservation of the Titicaca water frog and its habitats, reduce its threats and strengthen the capabilities of the main players involved in the conservation of the species and its habitats;
2. DIRECTS the Secretariat, in cooperation with the Chairs of the Animals Committee and the Standing Committee and subject to the availability of funding, to:
- a) cooperate closely with the Parties to formulate and implement measures that can increase the information available on the status of populations of the Titicaca water frog, its habitats and the effects of current threats, and strengthen initiatives to reduce and ultimately eliminate illegal trade of the species; and
 - b) facilitate the exchange of information between the natural range States of the species and Parties that constitute the final illegal trade in order to identify the networks that enable illegal trade;
3. URGES the relevant governments, donors and funding organizations as well as intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations to urgently support efforts aimed at conserving and controlling trade in the Titicaca water frog and its habitats through:
- a) the funding of activities to be undertaken by the Parties concerned in order to achieve the objectives of the present Resolution;
 - b) technical assistance and capacity building regarding generation of information, conservation, control and inspection strategies as well as awareness raising and outreach; and
 - c) information sharing on scientific, technical and legal aspects.

TENTATIVE BUDGET AND SOURCE OF FUNDING
FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF DRAFT RESOLUTIONS OR DECISIONS

According to Resolution Conf. 4.6 (Rev. CoP16) on Submission of draft resolutions, draft decisions and other documents for meetings of the Conference of the Parties, the Conference of the Parties decided that any draft resolutions or decisions submitted for consideration at a meeting of the Conference of the Parties that have budgetary and workload implications for the Secretariat or permanent committees must contain or be accompanied by a budget for the work involved and an indication of the source of funding. The authors of this document propose the following tentative budget and source of funding.

The authors of this document have not prepared a budget but propose that any task to be implemented by the Secretariat or the permanent committees in the framework of the draft resolution and decisions should be subject to the availability of funding.