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

Eighteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties
Geneva (Switzerland), 17–28 June 2019

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION ON CITES COP18 PROPOSALS 23, 24, 25 AND 26

This document has been submitted by Sri Lanka in relation with proposals 23, 24, 25 and 26.[1]

- CoP18 Prop. 23 (*Calotes nigrilabris* and *Calotes pethiyagodai)*
- CoP18 Prop. 24 **(***Ceratophora* spp),
- CoP18 Prop. 25 (*Cophotis ceylanica* and *Cophotis dumbara*) and
- CoP18 Prop. 26 (*Lyriocephalus scutatus*)

Introduction

The Government of Sri Lanka wishes to submit the following information in support of the above Proposals to amend Appendix I of CITES.

As with many species in trade, direct evidence of the impact of trade on wild populations of Sri Lankan agamids which are in demand for the international pet trade is difficult to ascertain. The full complement of data necessary to make such assessments, such as complete information regarding ecology and population dynamics, and the degree of current and anticipated offtake of the species concerned, is not available.

However, this does not preclude species from protection under CITES, as reflected in Annex 4 of Resolution Conf. 9.24 (Rev. CoP17), which directs Parties to apply the precautionary principle and "act in the best interest of the conservation of the species concerned" when "the status of a species or the impact of trade on the conservation of a species" is uncertain. In the case of the ten endemic species of Agamidae being proposed for inclusion in Appendix I, Sri Lanka urges Parties to consider these terms in conjunction with the highlighted and additional information presented below.

The Government of Sri Lanka also wishes to draw Parties' attention to its Sixth National Report for the Convention of Biological Diversity[2], highlighting the ecological importance of the endemic species which the Government of Sri Lanka is aiming to protect for the global community. The report delineates biogeographic distribution zones for Sri Lanka's reptiles, representing the first such zonation for this taxonomic group, and highlights their high vulnerability to external threats.

Of Sri Lanka's 220 recorded reptile species, 135 species are endemic. Thirty-five of these belong to seven endemic genera, two of which represent species being proposed for a CITES Appendix I listing - *Ceratophora* and *Lyriocephalus.*

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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.*

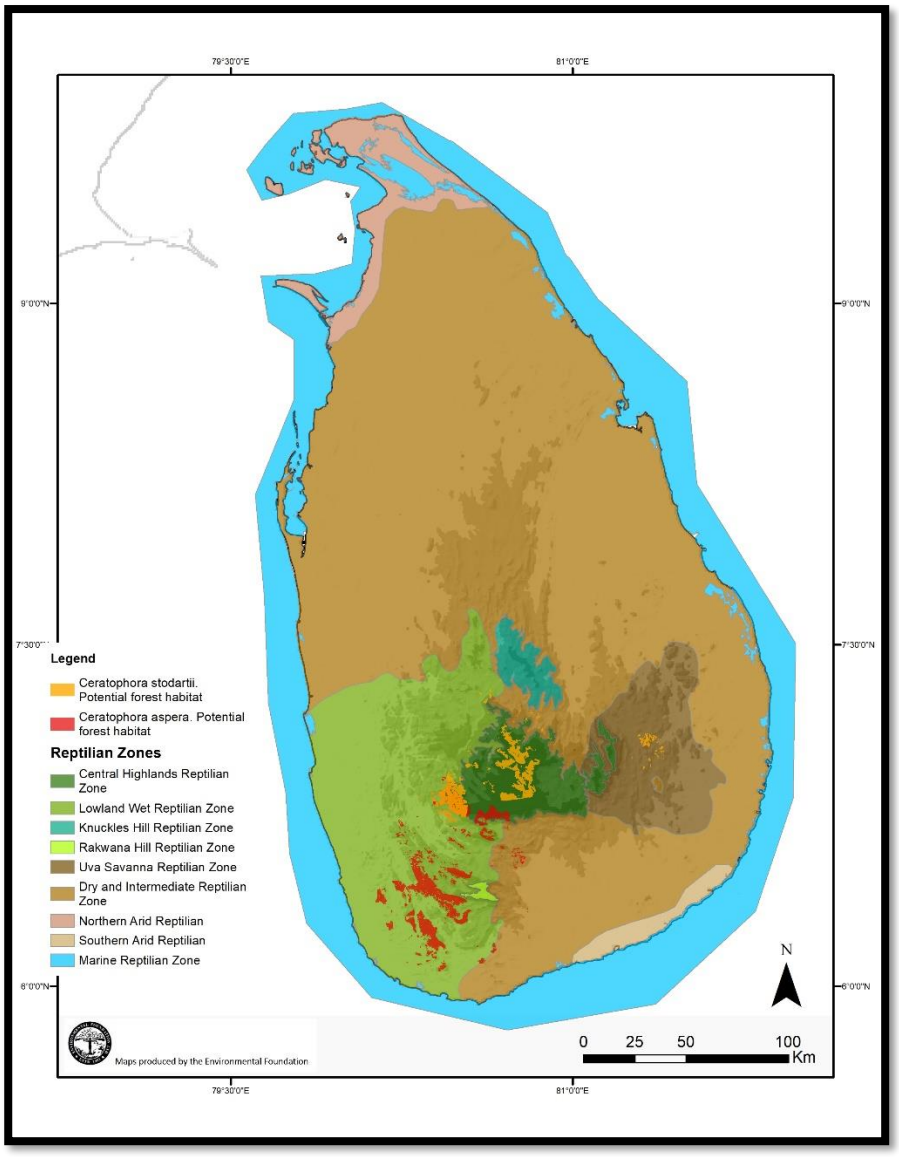
[2] *Sri Lanka Biodiversity Secretariat, Ministry of Mahaweli Development and Environment (2018): Sixth National Report for the Convention of Biological Diversity (in press)*

Proposal 23 (*Calotes nigrilabris* and *Calotes pethiyagodai*)

These species both have a very low reproduction rate of only 3-4 eggs/year, which when combined with the fact that gravid females can be preferentially targeted by collectors, illustrates the serious impact that even the offtake of even relatively small numbers may currently be having or be reasonably anticipated to have on wild and isolated populations.

Proposal 24 (*Ceratophora* spp)

Information available on population size and distribution is recent, and this all indicates that all five species in this genus are range restricted and considered threatened. *Ceratophora aspera* and *C. stoddartii* are the most commonly traded species in the genus.



Map 1: Potential habitat for *C. stoddartii* and *C. aspera*

Ceratophora aspera is currently classified as Endangered on Sri Lanka's National Red List (2012). More recently acquired information is especially concerning. Based on field surveys, individuals seem to be very patchily distributed even within suitable habitat (Map 1). The current estimate of 700+ sq km of remaining forests is therefore unlikely to be a true indicator of their distribution, population, or 'commonness'. Moisture, temperature and cover regime limit the distribution within a habitat.[3]

Preliminary findings from a recent study of the genetic variability of *C. aspera* across its range demonstrated that populations in three different habitat types showed considerable genetic variability (highest found at > 5.92% divergence). Although these findings are based on limited sample sizes, they highlight the critical role played by fragmentation and the increasing isolation of populations, and emphasize the need for a highly precautionary approach when assessing appropriate protection measures relating to *C. aspera*.[4]

The genetic variability among populations, in combination with intolerance of habitat disruption and patchy distribution within suitable habitat, strongly indicate the potential susceptibility of the species to offtake.

In the case of *Ceratophora stoddartii* its high level of trade has been confirmed by the most recently available analysis of Sri Lankan species, with it being found to be the third most commonly observed Sri Lankan reptile in trade.[5]

Justification for an Appendix I listing of *C. stoddartii* has also been corroborated since Proposal 24 was submitted, due to its restricted distribution, which is likely to be fragmented, and its decline in the wild due to habitat loss.[6]

Proposal 25 (*Cophotis ceylanica* and *Cophotis dumbara*)

In a recent study monitoring online commercial international trade of Sri Lanka's protected reptiles (from September 2016 to October 2018), a minimum of 477 individuals of 18 species were recorded. *Cophotis ceylanica* was the second most commonly observed in trade, and offers for specimens of this species were recorded in six countries.[7]

When Proposal 25 was submitted there was no retail price yet recorded for *Cophotis dumbara*. The above mentioned study found that this species was the most expensive one offered among those surveyed, at €1,443 (c.US$1,618).

Proposal 26 (*Lyriocephalus scutatus*)

While *Lyriocephalus scutatus* is the least rare species of the ten agamid species being proposed for Appendix I, it should be noted that it is highly sought after in the international pet trade due to its prominent snout and striking colour. The species is classified in Sri Lanka's National Red List (as of 2012) as Vulnerable, based on Criteria B1ab(iii), due to a limited extent of occurrence, its severely fragmented distribution and a continuing decline in area, extent and/or quality of habitat.

Lyriocephalus scutatus is the only member of its genus and is a prime candidate for judicious application of the precautionary princile as reflected in Annex 4 of Resolution Conf. 9.24 (Rev.CoP17), in order to prevent this species also becoming less common and more threatened due to international trade.

To the Government of Sri Lanka, the species is emblematic of what the global community can achieve in the present to ensure a future rich in biodiversity and ecological health. It is for this reason that *Lyriocephalus scutatus* was to be included in the logo of the 18th Conference of the Parties to CITES, had it been held in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

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3 Pers comm E. Wikramanayake, D. Samarasinghe & G. Arachilage, April 2019

4 *Wikramanayake, S. (PhD Scholar, University of Washington), Pallewatte, N. (Senior Lecturer, University of Colombo), Wikaramanayake, E. Abstract in press for Association of Tropical Biology & Conservation, Asia Chapter Conference 2019*

5,6 *Janssen, J. & de Silva (2019): Escalating Scale – presence of protected reptiles from Sri Lanka in international commercial trade. TRAFFIC Bulletin, April 2019.*

6 https://citesanalyses.iucn.org/