

CHEETAH TRADE PERMITS & SEIZURE

When should a cheetah seizure be made?

When a cheetah specimen (either a live animal or any derivative) is transported between countries, it must be accompanied by a valid CITES import, export or re-export permit or certificate. Without this, it is illegal. National CITES Authorities can assist with verifying the validity of CITES permits or certificates. For contact details see: <https://cites.org/eng/parties/country-profiles/national-authorities>

If there is no permit or there is doubt about permit validity, the cheetah specimen(s) may be seized by the law enforcement authority while investigation is ongoing. In this case, ensure that specimen(s) and associated evidence are secured, relevant authorities are notified and the welfare of live animals is prioritised.

How to secure evidence and maintain chain of custody records?

When evidence can be used in court to convict people of crime, it must be handled in a careful manner to prevent tampering or contaminations. Chain of custody records document how evidence is handled and managed between its collection and presentation in court. If chain of custody records are not established and properly maintained, it may cast doubt on the evidence presented and result in the prosecution being dismissed. See CITES Cheetah Trade Resource Kit, ‘Securing Evidence During a Seizure’ on chain of custody, and in particular part 3 for a sample form.

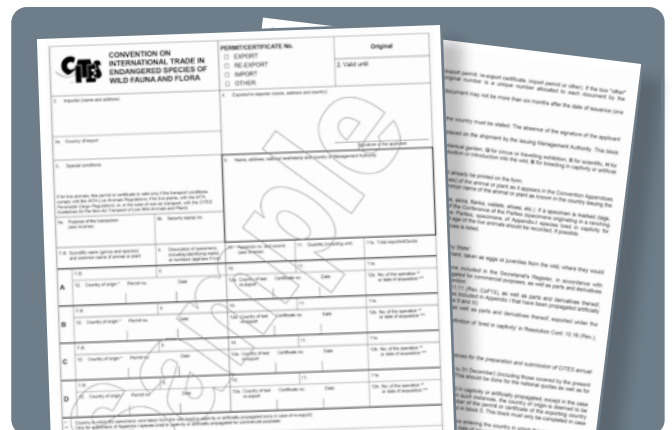
Key steps in the seizure process

- **Secure the crime scene to preserve evidence and prevent contamination.**
- **Designate an investigating officer** to be responsible for management of the scene, evidence collected and ensuring that chain of custody records are established and maintained.
- **Document the crime scene by making detailed notes and taking photographs or filming all the evidence**, including showing where it is found, before it is moved.
- **Individually identify and label each piece of evidence.** Assign unique identification numbers to both the seizure and each individual cheetah, or cheetah product seized to enable them all to be tracked.
- **Complete chain of custody forms.** Ensure evidence is only handled by authorised personnel.
- **Ensure any exchanges of evidence, or separation of sections of evidence (eg when taken to a lab for analysis) are recorded** on the chain of custody forms.

If live cheetah(s) are seized, these steps should be followed whilst prioritising animal health and welfare. Failure to do so could result in the death of the cheetah(s).

Collect evidence as quickly as possible, including taking photographs of the conditions where the cheetah(s) were found. While doing this, evaluate the cheetah(s)’ health, provide access to clean water and start planning for their care.

See Factsheet 4.



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Taking cheetah identification photos

It is important to take photographs of seized cheetahs and skins in order to help trace them. The spot patterns on each cheetah's fur are unique so they can be used to identify individual animals. The patterns are different on each side of the animal, so **both sides need to be photographed**. Most mobile phone cameras are good enough quality to use for identification photos.

Live cheetahs can be photographed in the cage if their spots are easily visible.



Photo © Helen O'Neill

Cheetah skins should be photographed from above with the skin fully spread out.



Take photos of the spot patterns on both sides of the body, include close-ups of each side of the cheetah's face if possible.



Dead cheetahs should also be photographed on both sides of the carcass.

Reporting a seizure

Report any seizures of cheetah specimens made by national law enforcement authority to the National CITES Management Authority and to relevant authority responsible for wildlife crime investigations in the country. National CITES and Enforcement Authorities contact details can be found here: <https://www.cites.org/eng/cms/index.php/component/cp>

In case of illegal international trade, law enforcement officers are encouraged to share information using the "Ecomessage" form. This should be sent to the INTERPOL National Central Bureau of relevant source, transit, and destination countries and with the INTERPOL General Secretariat in Lyon. It is downloadable from: <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/document/E-Res-11-03-R18.pdf> For more information see: https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/prog/implementation/enf/Practical_Guidelines_for_sharing_Information_with_Law_Enforcement_v2017.pdf

A necropsy may be conducted on any dead cheetah to determine the cause of death where possible. See CITES Cheetah Trade Resource Kit, 'Reporting a Seizure', part 10 'Necropsies' and part 11 'Cheetah Carcass - External Examination Form' for the relevant form.