

CITES Big Cats Task Force Meeting

Entebbe, Uganda

24 - 28 April 2023



Funding provided by
the United States Government



Participants



- Over 70 representatives from 28 countries across Africa, Asia, Europe, North America and South America
- Representatives from the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICWC),
- Other international inter-governmental
- Regional Wildlife Enforcement Networks
- Non-governmental organizations

CITES Big Cats Task Force | 24 – 28 April 2023



Species that the Task Force focused on:

- Cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus*)
- Mainland clouded leopard (*Neofelis nebulosa*)
- Sunda clouded leopard (*Neofelis diardi*)
- Lion (*Panthera leo*)
- Jaguar (*Panthera onca*)
- Leopard (*Panthera pardus*)
- Tiger (*Panthera tigris*)
- Snow leopard (*Panthera uncia*)



Mandate - Decision 19.92

The Secretariat shall

- convene the CITES Big Cats Task Force (in line with the ToR and *modus operandi*)
- provide support to the Task Force to:
 - i) **discuss** enforcement and implementation issues related to the illegal trade in specimens of big cats;
 - ii) **exchange intelligence and other information** on the illegal trade in big cats; and
 - iii) **develop strategies and make recommendations** to improve international cooperation regarding the enforcement of CITES concerning illegal trade in specimens of big cats; and
- report the findings and recommendations of the Task Force to the 77th and 78th meeting of the Standing Committee



Objectives of the meeting

- Discuss and exchange experience to generate a better understanding of enforcement and implementation issues related to the illegal trade in specimens of big cats, including on
 - The scale, dynamics and drivers of illegal trade
 - Demand for illegal live specimens and parts and derivatives, including the impact of domestic markets
 - Illegal trade involving big cats bred in captivity
 - Identification of big cat specimens in illegal trade
- Develop strategies and possible recommendations to strengthen regional and international cooperation to address illegal trade in big cats



Outcome of the Big Cats Task Force meeting

In accordance with Decision 19.92, the participants identified strategies, measures and activities to improve international collaboration regarding the enforcement of the Convention to address illegal trade in specimens of big cat species. Recommendations were agreed regarding:

- 1. Strengthen effective implementation and enforcement of the Convention with regards to illegal trade in big cat specimens**
- 2. Strengthen regulation of facilities breeding big cats in captivity to prevent and detect any illegal trade from such facilities and deploy strengthened enforcement measures**
- 3. Reducing demand to combat illegal trade in big cat specimens**
- 4. Identification of big cat specimens in trade**
- 5. Strengthen regional and international collaboration to address illegal trade in specimens of big cats**

1. Strengthen effective implementation and enforcement of the Convention with regards to illegal trade in big cat specimens

- The CITES Secretariat **to consider the merits of a resolution on illegal trade in big cats**, including a **possible revision of Resolution 12.5** (Rev. CoP19) on *Conservation of and trade in tigers and other Appendix-I Asian big cat species* to be applicable to all big cat species and include this in its report to the Standing Committee

Regarding enforcement

- Parties to:
- establish or strengthen **multi-agency units** consisting of vetted staff from government agencies responsible for wildlife law enforcement, e.g. customs, police, forest and wildlife authorities, and prosecutors to address illegal trade and trafficking of specimens of big cat species in line with **Res. Conf. 11.3 (Rev. CoP19)** on *Compliance and enforcement*, para. 10 a) and para. 11 in **Res. Conf. 18.6.** on *Designation and role of Management Authorities*;
- a) ensure adequate resources and capacities to enforce legislation addressing illegal trade in big cat specimens including by
 - i) **sensitizing prosecutors and judges** on the seriousness of wildlife crime, including matters affecting big cats; and
 - ii) **strengthening the capacity of law enforcement officers** to use innovative law enforcement and investigative methods and techniques, including **intelligence-led investigation, technology and forensic analytical techniques** in line with **Res. Conf. 12.5 (Rev. CoP19)**, para 1 d) and **Res. Conf. 11.3 (Rev. CoP19)**, para. 9;

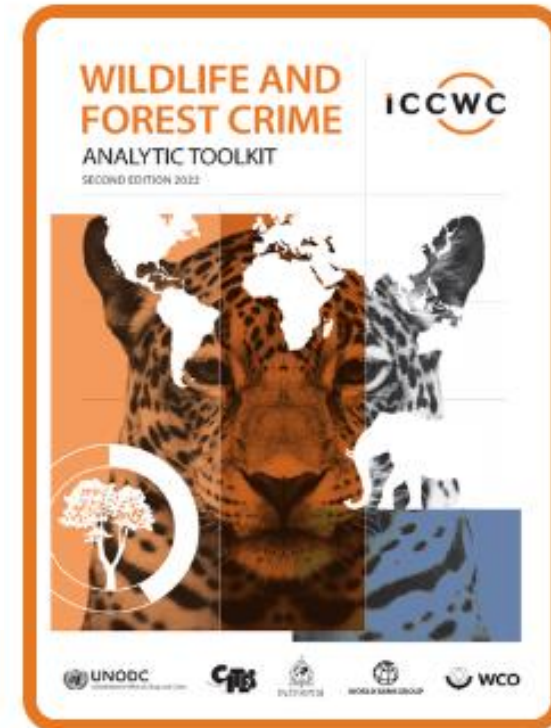
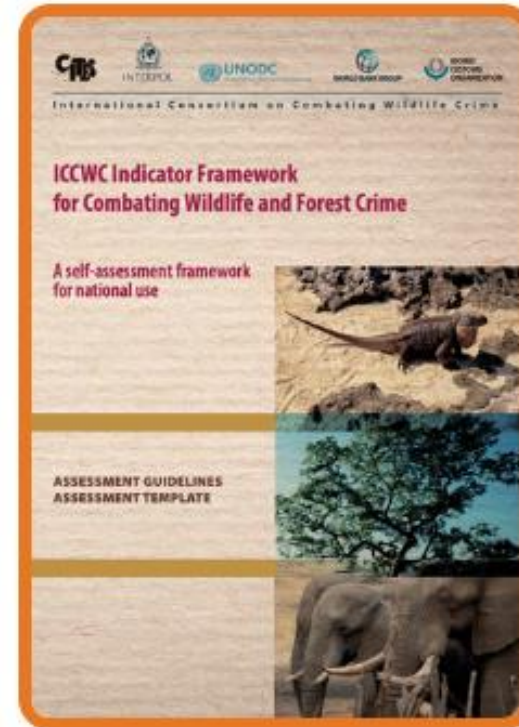
1. Strengthen effective implementation and enforcement of the Convention with regards to illegal trade in big cat specimens, cont.

Regarding enforcement, cont.

- make use of the [ICCWC Indicator Framework for Combating Wildlife and Forest Crime](#) (a self-assessment framework for national use) to measure and monitor the effectiveness of their law enforcement responses to wildlife crime and illegal trade in big cat species and further encourage application of the full [ICCWC toolkit](#) and donor Parties to financially support the implementation action plans arising from the toolkit application.

Available for free on ICCWC website:

<https://www.iccwc-wildlifecrime.org>



1. Strengthen effective implementation and enforcement of the Convention with regards to illegal trade in big cat specimens, cont.

Regarding the CITES annual illegal trade data and other data

Parties to:

- **submit information on seizures of specimens of big cat species in their Annual Illegal Trade Report** in accordance with paragraph 3 of Resolution Conf. 11.17 (Rev. CoP19) on *National reports* and Resolution Conf. 12.5 (Rev. CoP19), paragraph 1 e);
- **analyze data** concerning illegal trade in specimens of big cat species available in the **CITES Illegal Trade Database** and through other appropriate sources, to ensure effective and timely responses to any existing or newly emerging threats
- **implement measures to address any data and information gaps regarding population trends, use, illegal trade, substitutes or other relevant matters that are identified**, with the aim to identify and engage where appropriate, potential partners at national, regional and international level to cooperate in fighting big cat trafficking.
- In recognition of the importance of **comprehensive legislation** related to big cat species in trade,
 - **consider amending national regulations to address illegal trade in big cats in relation to non-native/exotic species, hybrid animals bred in captivity**, and, regulations to prevent trade in readily recognizable derivatives

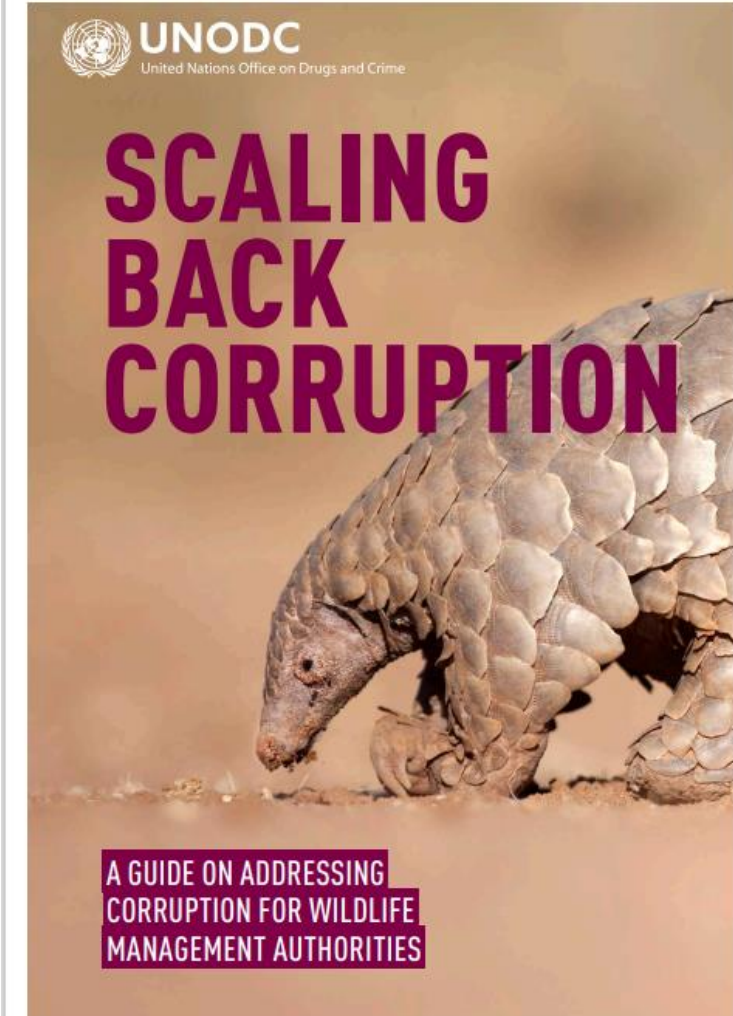


1. Strengthen effective implementation and enforcement of the Convention with regards to illegal trade in big cat specimens, cont.

Regarding addressing corruption

To address and mitigate corruption risks it was agreed that it is important for Parties to:

- **pursue the implementation of [Resolution Conf. 17.6 \(Rev. CoP19\)](#) on *Prohibiting, preventing, detecting and countering corruption, which facilitates activities conducted in violation of the Convention*, including in the context of illegal trade in specimens of big cat species;**
- **undertake risk assessments to identify high corruption risk areas** associated with big cat species and to accordingly develop and implement strategies to counter corruption, including by developing and implementing corruption prevention policies, codes of conduct and ethics for staff working on big cat issues; and
- **pursue enhancing collaboration between relevant governmental agencies, civil society organizations and other relevant stakeholders on the implementation of measures to prevent and combat corruption** associated with trade in big cats.
- *Example: Nigeria has requested UNODC to conduct a Corruption Risk Assessment for the wildlife and forestry sectors in Nigeria*



2. Strengthen regulation of facilities breeding big cats in captivity to prevent and detect any illegal trade from such facilities and deploy strengthened enforcement measures

Parties to:

- if they have not already done so, develop in consultation with relevant stakeholders, adopt and implement national legislation and protocols to **regulate breeding of big cats in captivity to prevent any illegal activities that could be associated with such facilities**, including by
- **requiring licensing (subject to regular renewal) of each facility breeding big cats and establishment of a national register of big cat breeding facilities, including marking for identification and registration of each individual big cat** (for example by using photos, microchips, DNA samples) and their history (origin/affiliation, transfer, reproduction, death and disposal);
- **addressing husbandry and welfare conditions based on national and international guidance** and best practices for keeping big cats in captivity;
- **taking into consideration the purpose of breeding, contribution to conservation and adequacy of management of the facility when considering any applications for licenses and evaluating and monitoring existing facilities;**
- **undertaking regular inspections, monitoring and audits of big cat breeding facilities** as well as conducting unannounced spot checks by authorized personnel, based on established procedures/protocols; and
- **establish protocols for the disposal of big cat specimens**, in line with **Res. Conf. 17.8 (Rev. CoP19) *Disposal of illegally traded and confiscated specimens of CITES-listed species*** and keeping accurate record of such disposal in accordance with **Res. Conf. 12.5 (Rev. CoP19)**, paragraph 1 h);

Parties are encouraged to apply the above measures to entities keeping big cats in captivity.



2. Strengthen regulation of facilities breeding big cats in captivity to prevent and detect any illegal trade from such facilities and deploy strengthened enforcement measures, cont.

Parties should also:

- with respect to tigers and other Asian big cat species, implement paragraph 1 h) of Res. Conf. 12.5 (Rev. CoP19);
- strengthen the capacity and resources for effective **inspection of big cat captive breeding facilities and rescue centres**; and
- where applicable, consider **strengthening the regulation of private possession/ownership of big cat specimens to help address illegal trade.**

Example: United States of America's Big Cat Public Safety Act



3. Reducing demand to combat illegal trade in big cat specimens

Parties to:

- **implement evidence-based behavior change initiatives to reduce such demand** in line with **Res. Conf. 17.4** (Rev. CoP19) on *Demand reduction strategies to combat illegal trade in CITES-listed species* and the ***Guidance for CITES Parties to Develop and Implement Demand Reduction Strategies to Combat Illegal Trade in CITES-listed Species*** endorsed at CoP19;
- **consider addressing the underlying drivers of demand within communities in source countries**, e.g. by investing in livelihood approaches
- **consider addressing the underlying drivers of demand in destination countries**; and
- **strengthen national legislation to close any domestic commercial markets for specimens of big cat species that are contributing to poaching or illegal trade** including in line with Res. Conf. 12.5 (Rev. CoP19), para. 1 c).



3. Reducing demand to combat illegal trade in big cat specimens, cont.

Regarding collaboration and information sharing

Parties to:

- identify **existing research into uses of big cats and to support additional research** where gaps are identified;
- **share demand reduction big cat case studies, tools and other information among practitioners**, including through open access platforms;

Regarding illegal trade on the Internet, social media and corporate social responsibility

Parties to:

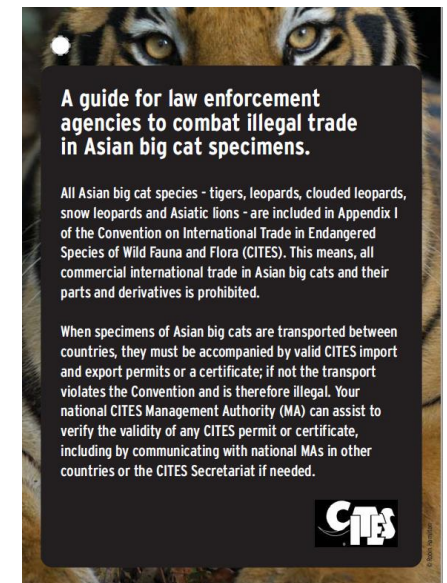
- **engage online platforms to raise public awareness** of illegal trade in specimens of big cat species in line with **Res. Conf. 11.3 (Rev. CoP19)**, subparagraphs 16 f) and g); and
- through partnerships and other mechanisms to **address the role and influence of social media and online platforms in creating demand for and facilitating illegal trade in big cats.**



4. Identification of big cat specimens in trade

Regarding available tools for identification

- a) assess the capacities and needs with regard to identification of big cat specimens and provide capacity-building as well as training on the available tools for frontline enforcement personnel;
- b) draw upon existing tools regarding identification of specimens of big cats species such as the *Asian Big Cat Field Pocket Guide for law enforcement front line officers*, *CITES Cheetah Trade Resource Kit* and fact sheets, which includes among other things detailed identification guides for both live cheetahs and cheetah specimens; and [CITES Identification Materials](#) available on the CITES website; and
- c) develop and disseminate guides, apps, manuals and printed materials for identifying specimens of other big cat species in illegal trade amongst frontline law enforcement officers.



4. Identification of big cat specimens in trade

With regard to the use of forensic science

- develop, standardize and disseminate Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and simplified procedures to facilitate sample collection from seized big cat specimens for forensic analysis to, as applicable, support species identification, determine geographical origin, identify individual animals and verify their wild or captive source and support investigative processes; and
- promote and encourage the standardization of forensic techniques concerning big cat identification as well as technique validation in order to facilitate the sharing of information and data across laboratories.



4. Identification of big cat specimens in trade, cont.

Parties are encouraged to

- use the **CITES Directory of Laboratories that Conduct Wildlife Forensic Testing**
- **share additional forensic expertise and tools** with the CITES Secretariat for inclusion on the **CITES webpage on [Wildlife Forensics](#)**;
- take note that the **United States Fish and Wildlife Service Forensics Laboratory, within the limits of its resources, makes its services freely available to any CITES Party for analyses of big cat samples at its premises, and to reach out to the laboratory for support as may be needed;**
- take **note that methods for the identification of tiger species and specimens have been developed by the Czech Republic** and that analytical kits for use of these methods, as well as testing of tiger samples, are available to Parties free of charge (See Dec. 19.109, para c);
- gather and maintain information on specialists in big cat identification and laboratories that can assist with analyses in support of big cat identification, for such information to be at hand when needed; and
- where possible, share big cat reference material and information with recognized institutions, to support the development of forensic analysis techniques and reference databases in different countries, allowing for quick in-country or regional level analysis and the findings of such analyses.



4. Identification of big cat specimens in trade, cont.

Regarding information sharing

- Parties are encouraged to utilise the CITES website for identification materials to collect and make available big cat identification resources and seek assistance from CITES bodies in developing and promulgating national or regional identification materials in accordance with [Resolution 19.4 on Materials for identification of specimens of CITES-listed species](#) as outlined in Decision 19.109 and in line with [Notification to the Parties 2023/051](#) of 20 April 2023.

Regarding registration of forensic research institutions

- Parties are encouraged to consider registration of forensic research institutions in the CITES Register of scientific institutions to facilitate and expedite the exchange of big cat forensic research specimens in accordance with Art. VII, paragraph 6, of the Convention and [Res. Conf. 11.15 \(Rev. CoP18\) Non-commercial loan, donation or exchange of museum, herbarium, diagnostic and forensic research specimens.](#)



5. Strengthen regional and international collaboration to address illegal trade in specimens of big cats

Parties to:

- **share information in order to harmonize legislation** to address wildlife crime, including illegal trade in big cats (e.g through WEN framework);
- where not yet done, **consider developing Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) or similar bilateral/regional agreements to facilitate transboundary monitoring and intelligence-sharing, collaboration and information exchange** to address illegal trade in specimens of big cat species and to prevent any concerns about data usage;
- where not yet done, **implement provisions of UNTOC to provide mutual legal assistance to disrupt transnational organized crime in big cats and to enter into extradition agreements;**
- where not yet done, **designate enforcement focal points** to facilitate information sharing and coordination of enforcement efforts with regard to illegal trade in big cat;



5. Strengthen regional and international collaboration to address illegal trade in specimens of big cats

- **take advantage of existing mechanism/platforms** (e.g INTERPOL, World Customs Organization (WCO), regional policing bodies such as ASEANAPOL, EUROPOL etc.) **for regional and international cooperation** on illegal trade in big cats;
- **increase the use of INTERPOL secure communication channels (I-24/7) and Notices** to share and exchange information about illegal trade in big cat species and the criminals involved;
- explore opportunities, where illegal trade in specimens of big cat species is detected, to **engage with INTERPOL, the WCO and other ICCWC partners for support as may be needed**;
- facilitate analysis and timely operational activities by sharing information with source, transit or destination countries as applicable on seizures involving big cat specimens, including information on modus operandi, accompanying documentation, details of offenders involved, and any other information that could assist the initiation of investigations; and
- make every effort to **participate in the global law enforcement operations convened by INTERPOL and the WCO** to address illegal wildlife trade in line with Res. Conf. 11.3 (Rev. CoP19), para. 14, and to consider initiating or continue similar operations at national and regional levels, in particular targeting poaching and illegal trade in big cat species.



5. Strengthen regional and international collaboration to address illegal trade in specimens of big cats, cont.

- Parties were encouraged to **explore opportunities to join existing or new platforms, such as the International Big Cat Alliance** as proposed by India for sharing information, best practices and ideas which may be of assistance to address illegal trade in big cats and associated issues for big cat conservation.
- It was also agreed to invite intergovernmental agencies and regional wildlife enforcement networks (WENs) to expand their work on illegal trade in big cats and further invite:
 - **INTERPOL to explore opportunities to convene Regional Investigative and Analytical Case meetings (RIACM)** focusing on cases involving illegal trade in specimens of big cat species;
 - **INTERPOL and the WCO to explore opportunities to coordinate targeted regional or international operations** focusing on combating illegal trade in big cat species;
 - **WENs to consider including in their work programmes activities aimed specifically at addressing illegal trade in big cat species.**



Regarding mobilizing investigations into illicit financial flows

Parties to:

- implement **national legislation to combat money laundering and facilitate asset forfeiture** associated with illegal trade in big cats and other serious wildlife crime, and to actively implement activities bringing together wildlife trade and money laundering expertise, including from financial intelligence units, as anticipated by the provisions of Resolution Conf. 11.3 (Rev. CoP19) on *Compliance and enforcement*;
- to the extent possible **ensure there is adequate capacity to conduct financial investigations**, to quantify the value of illegal trade in big cats, and to identify international financial flows related to the illegal trade in big cats, and
- **increase awareness amongst national authorities about the importance of incorporating financial investigations** in investigations concerning illegal trade in big cat species and other serious wildlife crimes;
- **draw upon the tools and reports** developed by the Financial Action Task Force, the Egmont Centre of FIU Excellence and Leadership (ECOFEL), the Southern African Anti-Money Laundering Integrated Task Force (SAAMLIT), Asset Recovery Interagency Networks (e.g ARIN, CARIN), etc. and ICCWC partners available on the Enforcement and ICCWC webpages on the CITES Secretariat website, in support of strengthening their work to address illicit financial flows from illegal trade in big cat species and other serious wildlife crimes.



- The Secretariat will report the findings and recommendations of the Big Cats Task Force to the 77th meeting of the Standing Committee (November 2023, Geneva)
- New item about the Task Force will be posted early this week on CITES website
- The outcome document, when edited and translated, will be posted on CITES website (Enforcement webpage)



**Thank you
Merci**

