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THE TRAFFIC REPORT



Results from CITES COP15

Outcomes were tough for tuna, static for African elephants, and great for a few reptiles at CITES COP15, which was held in Doha, Qatar, March 13-25, 2010. As always, TRAFFIC contributed pertinent research and recommendations, advocated for specific protections, and brought scientific data to bear on how CITES regulates international trade in wild animals and plants. Here are a few highlights from COP15.

Marine Species

Highly valuable fisheries commodities — including red and pink corals (*Coralliidae spp.*), Atlantic bluefin tuna (*Thunnus thynnus*), and four shark species — were up for listing under CITES at COP15.

The U.S. and the EU submitted a proposal to list red and pink corals (used in the jewelry industry) in Appendix II, but the proposal did not get the necessary two-thirds majority to pass into law.



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Bluefin tuna was proposed for listing in Appendix I (which bans international commercial trade) because disastrous management and unsustainable trade is threatening the species with commercial extinction. But prior to COP15, the major commercial fisheries interests of Japan and China worked to persuade governments not to support more protective tuna and shark listings. After intense and emotional debate, all of the marine proposals made by the U.S. and European nations were overruled by commercial interests, leaving these species prey to further overexploitation.

However, bluefin tuna gained important new ground as it became the most hotly contested issue at CITES. What we lost in the vote we gained in tremendous global visibility on this issue and in public commitments by ICCAT and Japan to rebuilding this species and the fishery. The conservation community has made important advocacy inroads among consumers, businesses and governments, which will only grow as we move toward ICCAT in November 2010.

Terrestrial Species

TRAFFIC played a key role at the meeting in securing new enforcement initiatives to protect rhinos, tigers and a range of other species. Tiger range countries, including China, reached a consensus on how to address pressing concerns of illegal trade that threaten populations of tigers and other Asian big cat species. The range countries agreed on language to improve measures on law enforcement, regional cooperation, reporting and a tiger trade database. CITES parties maintained their position against the farming of tigers for trade in parts and derivatives. The commitments from COP15 will no doubt roll into the Global Tiger Summit in Russia later this year.

Regarding rhinos, CITES parties adopted a proposal for a combined ivory and rhino task force to be convened in the coming year. The task force will include organizations like INTERPOL, and the World Customs Organization, plus range states, and importing and transit countries. In addition, a successful U.S. proposal called for immediate bilateral exchanges among law enforcement agencies, intelligence officers of key African range states, and

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agencies, intelligence officers of key African range states, and Asian consuming countries, to be facilitated by the CITES Secretariat.

Discussion of proposals regarding African elephants (*Loxodonta africana*) took most of a day that was punctuated by bursts of applause and occasional boos. Tanzania split its proposal into one on downlisting its elephant population and one on the sale of ivory stockpiles. After a healthy debate, both proposals failed. In response, Zambia immediately amended its proposal to remove the request for a one-off ivory sale. A lively debate again ensued, and Zambia's downlisting proposal failed.

Kenya and other African countries put forward a proposal urging parties not to submit any ivory trade proposals for the remainder of the 9-year moratorium agreed upon at COP14 (which applied only to the populations downlisted to Appendix II at that meeting). After a heated debate, it went to a vote and failed. Kenya then withdrew its original proposal for a 20-year moratorium.

The antagonism between African elephant range states continues to be marked. On the last day of the Qatar meeting, both Tanzania and Zambia reopened the elephant downlisting debate but both votes held without any changes.

Despite the setbacks in marine species protection, CITES achieved notable successes, including protection for several rare reptile and amphibian species traded, largely via the Internet, as pets (see article below on Kaiser's spotted newt).

The next meeting of CITES will be held in Thailand in 2013, and TRAFFIC will start working now to ensure that COP16 produces even greater conservation advances for species threatened by trade.

Contributed by Leigh Henry, TRAFFIC North America

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NEWS FROM MEXICO

Morelet's Crocodile No Longer Faces Extinction in Mexico and Belize

CITES agreed to move Morelet's crocodile from Appendix I to Appendix II during the meeting in Doha, Qatar (COP15, March 2010). A 35-year international trade ban implemented less than half a century ago has enabled the successful recovery of the reptile. Species listed in Appendix II are not considered to be threatened with extinction; Appendix II are considered of lower risk and international trade for commercial purposes is allowed, with some requisites. The proposal to transfer these Morelet's crocodile populations to Appendix II followed the precautionary principle and was accompanied by a zero quota for the commercial export of wild specimens. This means that only captive-bred specimens can be internationally traded for commercial purposes.



© Chris Martin Bahr / WWF-Canon

Two species of crocodile can be found in Mexico: the American crocodile (*Crocodylus acutus*) and the Morelet's crocodile (*Crocodylus moreletii*). The Morelet's is smaller in size and its distribution in Mexico represents close to 85 percent of its global range, from the central part of Tamaulipas to the Yucatan peninsula; it is also present in Belize and in northern Guatemala. Authorities did not have enough information on the Guatemalan population's current conservation status, and therefore decided to keep them in Appendix I until more field studies are carried out and enough data are gathered to sustain an amendment.

In the past 50 years, wild populations of Morelet's crocodile decreased significantly due to overexploitation for their skin, which is one of the most valued in the international market due to its excellent quality. For this reason, the species has been included in CITES Appendix I since the Convention entered into force in 1975. The transference of the Belizean and Mexican populations to Appendix II is consistent with IUCN's Red List and Mexico's list of species at risk (NOM-059-SEMARNAT-2001), both of which recognize that the species' wild populations — currently estimated at around 100,000 individuals — are stable. The amendment under CITES is an important first step at the international level to adapt crocodile management — including the potential sustainable use (i.e., international trade) of this resource based on updated information and the stability of wild populations, which is part of the Belize-Guatemala-Mexico Tri-national Management and Conservation Strategy.

In 2005, Mexico officially submitted a proposal to U.S. authorities to reclassify the species under the U.S. Endangered Species Act (ESA) according to the current conservation status of its populations, but no answer has been received. The ESA listing means that no specimen can be legally imported into the United States, even if it comes from a closed-cycle captive-breeding facility. Therefore, the great potential to use this species sustainably is currently limited by its status in U.S. legislation.

Contributed by Paola Mbsig, TRAFFIC North America-Mexico

TRAFFIC Supports Mexico's Wildlife Council

According to Mexico's National Wildlife Law (LGVS), the National Technical Advisory Wildlife Council (Consejo Técnico Consultivo Nacional, or CONAVIS) was officially established in October 2009. It was created to provide guidelines and expert advice to the federal government in relation to priorities, objectives and strategies for the conservation and sustainable use of species of wild origin in Mexico.

TRAFFIC undertook the organization of a priority-setting workshop to contribute to this initiative by setting a solid framework that promotes and provides incentives for active participation by all relevant sectors in Mexico. The workshop was held with the support of the British Embassy in Mexico; DEFRA, UK's Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; and the Environment Ministry Wildlife Directorate (Dirección General de Vida Silvestre SEMARNAT), as part of a project that aims to improve the conservation of natural resources and promote their sustainable use.

At the April 20 workshop, several council members and 34 top level experts from various sectors in Mexico worked to identify key conservation and sustainable wildlife issues, as well as existing opportunities. As a result, key wildlife-related topics were agreed upon by the participants and by the National Wildlife Council in its second ordinary session on April 21, 2010.

TRAFFIC considers this outcome a milestone for the role of the public sector in wildlife management in Mexico. Another important result of the workshop was the establishment of direct communication channels among the diverse sectors affected by and responsible for wildlife management and conservation in the country.

Contributed by Adrian Reuter, TRAFFIC North America-Mexico

Toward a Regional Enforcement Network in Central America

Central American countries hold seven percent of the Earth's species within a biological corridor that plays a vital role in the maintenance of long-term evolutionary processes in the Western Hemisphere. Within the region there is significant hunting, harvest and sale of wild species for both local use and international trade. Plants and animals are traded for a range of uses – live animals for the pet trade, reptile skins for leather products, marine species for food and curios, and plants for horticulture. The seven Central American countries of Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama form an interconnected landscape that acts as a bridge for trafficking between North and South America. Because of all this, it is important to coordinate enforcement of laws governing wildlife trafficking both regionally and internationally.

To that end, a workshop was held April 15-16 in San Salvador to initiate regional dialogues on establishing CAWEN — the Central American Wildlife Enforcement Network. The event, made possible largely due to the generous support of the U.S. Department of State, brought together government stakeholders to study similar initiatives and to develop some initial ideas of what such a structure could look like in Central America. The approximately 40 participants included representatives from the Dominican Republic, Central American countries, Ecuador, Brazil and Peru, along with experts from the CITES Secretariat, INTERPOL, the U.S. Department of Justice and the organizing agencies (TRAFFIC, USDol, CCAD).

During the workshop, law enforcement experts and agency representatives from the region and beyond focused on ways to improve co-ordination, build capacity and learn from other wildlife enforcement network examples. Information was shared on best practices and on lessons learned from networking approaches such as ASEAN-WEN and the TRAFFIC Mexico wildlife law enforcement capacity-building program. TRAFFIC Mexico presented information on existing tools that can be used to evaluate and improve enforcement operations, define the capacity-building programs needed, and tailor existing capacity-building programs to the national and regional context.

Contributed by Adrian Reuter, TRAFFIC North America-Mexico

NEWS FROM CANADA

Wildlife Forensics Experts Meet

The inaugural meeting of the Society for Wildlife Forensic Science took place April 18-23, 2010, in Ashland, Oregon. Formed in November 2009, the society's mission is to develop wildlife forensic science into a comprehensive, integrated and mature discipline. The meeting drew 129 registrants from 10 countries — Australia, Brazil, Canada, Hong Kong, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, Thailand, the United Kingdom, and the United States — making it the largest international gathering of wildlife forensic scientists ever held. The event was co-hosted by the National Fish and Wildlife Forensic Laboratory, and the Wyoming Game and Fish Wildlife Forensic and Fish Health Laboratory.

The meeting covered an array of topics, primarily related to the identification of species in support of law enforcement. Two academic posters were coauthored by the staff of TRAFFIC North America-Canada in collaboration with Simon Fraser University's Centre for Forensic Research and Ancient DNA Laboratory:

- The Use of Hydrogen Peroxide to Alter Black Coral (*Antipatharia*) for the Purpose of Imitating Gold Coral (*Gerardia* sp.). Angela Leung, Ernest W.T. Cooper, Tanya Shadbolt, Mark Skinner, PhD.
- Ancient DNA Analysis of Dried Coral Samples: An Accurate DNA-based Identification of Threatened Species Support of Wildlife Trade Law Enforcement. Ursula Arndt, MA; Camilla Speller; Ernest W.T. Cooper; Angela Leung; Mark Skinner, PhD; Dongya Yang, PhD.

Membership in the Society for Wildlife Forensic Sciences is open to any individual who might impact the wildlife forensics community. More information about the society may be found at <http://www.wildlifeforensicscience.org/content/about-society-wildlife-forensic-sciences>.

Contributed by Ernie Cooper, TRAFFIC North America-Canada

Protected By Consensus

Iran submitted its first-ever proposal to list a species under CITES at COP15 in Doha, Qatar. The proposal was to list the Kaiser's spotted newt (*Neurergus kaiseri*) in CITES Appendix I, thereby prohibiting the international trade of the species for primarily commercial purposes. The proposal passed unanimously.

The Kaiser's spotted newt is an endangered species of salamander that is endemic to a few streams in Iran. The species was last assessed by the IUCN in 2008 as Critically Endangered. Threats to the species include over-collection for the pet and hobbyist trade, habitat loss, severe droughts, fluctuating water levels in streams, and the introduction of nonnative fishes.

TRAFFIC originally reported on a study of the extent of illegal trade in Kaiser's spotted newt in the May 2006 issue of the TRAFFIC Report (Vol.5, No1.). The study, completed by TRAFFIC-North America (Canada) found that the Kaiser's spotted newt was being advertised for sale on various internet sites around the world, fetching prices of up to \$340 per specimen. It was also determined that many of these specimens were taken from the wild without the issuance of Iranian permits. One

of the study recommendations was that Iran submit a proposal to list the species on Appendix I. TRAFFIC was very pleased when this recommendation was fulfilled at COP15.

Although the Appendix I listing will reduce the illegal trade of Kaiser's spotted newts from the wild, the species still faces habitat loss and other threats; therefore, additional efforts are needed to prevent extinction of the species in the wild.

Contributed by Tanya Shadbolt, TRAFFIC North America-Canada

Enforcement Successes in the News

Three Fined for Contravening Endangered Species Act

Three Toronto men have been fined a total of CA \$10,500 (US \$10,130) on charges related to harvesting and possessing an endangered plant species on private land. Jong Hak Lee, Joe Yeal Yu and Seong Gon Lee pleaded guilty on March 4, 2010, to charges of possessing wild American ginseng in contravention of the Ontario provincial Endangered Species Act (ESA). They also pleaded guilty to entering posted private land in violation of the Trespass to Property Act. In addition, Jong Hak Lee pleaded guilty to harvesting wild American ginseng in contravention of the ESA.

Source: Ministry of Natural Resources, ontario.ca/mnr, March 9, 2010

Man Convicted for Illegal Sale of Protected Turtles

Between May 27 and June 26, 2009, Stephen Shillingford offered these species of turtle for sale on the Internet: musk, western painted, midland painted, spiny softshell, spotted and common snapping. On March 10, 2010, he was convicted on eight charges related to illegally selling and offering to sell game wildlife and wildlife specially protected under Canada's Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act. The act prohibits keeping specially protected and game wildlife in captivity except under the authority of a license. Since June 2008, species at risk — including the spotted, spiny softshell and musk (stinkpot) turtles from Ontario — have had additional protection under the U.S. Endangered Species Act. Shillingford was fined CA \$4,000 (US \$3,859).



© Ronald Petocz / WWF-Canon

Source: Ministry of Natural Resources, ontario.ca/mnr, March 16, 2010

Donut Shop Owner Guilty of Smuggling Ivory

Moun Chau, owner of Pixie Donuts in Claremont, Calif., pleaded guilty on April 8, 2010, to one count of importing ivory as part of a plea agreement. He will face up to five years in federal prison and up to US \$250,000 in fines when he is sentenced on October 18, 2010, in Los Angeles federal court.



© WWF-Canon / Folke Wulf

Federal prosecutors accused Chau of conspiring with a seller in Thailand between May and November 2006 to import African elephant tusks. Prosecutors said Chau bought ivory through eBay from Samark Chokchoyma, who shipped the goods to Chau in disguised packages — one shipment was described in a customs declaration as a gift containing toys. Chau imported about US \$2,750 worth of ivory in the course of the conspiracy, prosecutors said. Chokchoyma has been arrested in Thailand and faces criminal charges there, but has been free on US \$5,000 bail since his March arraignment.

According to the plea agreement filed March 24, federal prosecutors agreed to drop a conspiracy charge against Chau and recommend leniency in his sentencing in exchange for his guilty plea.

Source: Los Angeles Newspaper Group - Daily Bulletin <http://www.dailybulletin.com>, April 27, 2010

Bird Smuggler Sentenced to Prison

Sony Dong, of Garden Grove, Calif., pleaded guilty in April to illegally importing wild birds. On June 7, 2010, he was sentenced to four months in prison and ordered to pay US \$4,000 in restitution to federal authorities, who are caring for the birds. Authorities discovered 14 live Asian songbirds fastened to pieces of cloth around Dong's calves during a plane trip from Vietnam to Los Angeles in December 2008. When officials served a search warrant at Dong's home, they found 51 additional songbirds, including red-whiskered bulbuls, magpie robins and shamas thrushes.



© James Eaton / WWF Greater Mekong

Codefendant Duc Le, also from Garden Grove, was the ringleader of the operation and pleaded guilty in April to conspiracy and illegally importing wildlife. He was sentenced June 7, 2010, to six months in prison and ordered to pay more than US \$25,000 in restitution. Le and Dong will both be on three years probation after serving their prison terms.

Source: The Associated Press, June 7, 2010

Taiwanese Couple Caught Smuggling Coral

Gloria Chu and Ivan Chu, of Taipei, pleaded guilty on March 11, 2010, to conspiracy to ship internationally protected black coral into the United States in violation of federal wildlife statutes. In a federal court in the U.S. Virgin Islands, the Chus admitted that from 2007 to 2009 they sent more than US \$194,000 worth of black coral to Company X. Each pleaded guilty to nine counts including conspiracy, false statements, and violations of both the Endangered Species Act and the Lacey Act. Black coral is listed in Appendix II of CITES and is subject to strict trade regulations. According to the plea agreements, Ivan Chu has agreed to serve 30 months in prison and pay a US \$12,500 fine.

Gloria Chu has agreed to serve 20 months in prison and pay a US \$12,500 fine. Both defendants will be prohibited from shipping coral and other wildlife products to the United States for a three-year period after their release from prison. A sentencing date has been set for June 23, 2010.

Source: United States Department of Justice news release, March 11, 2010

Saiga Antelope Horns Seized in Xinjiang

On April 10, 2010, Customs officials at Horgos Port in Xinjiang Province seized a parcel containing 68 saiga antelope horns. The two female smugglers took an international coach from Alma-Ata in Kazakhstan to Urumchi in China, and then tried to escape the X-ray check in the immigration hall. At the time, this was the biggest seizure of saiga antelope horn at Horgos Port this year.



© Hartmut Jungius / WWF-Canon

Source: www.nihaotw.com, April 21, 2010

Breakthrough Arrests in San Luis Potosi

More than 1,165 specimens of flora, fauna and by-products were seized in Charco Cerado, San Luis Potosi, Mexico, on April 16, 2010. Detained was Margarito Castañeda, who has been identified as the leader of species trafficking in the region. He and another individual (unidentified) are accused of collection, possession, distribution and marketing of protected wildlife and endangered species listed under CITES.



© Edward Parker / WWF-Canon

The specimens seized included birds, cacti, palms and mammals, most of them in danger of extinction. According to the Federal Penal Code in Mexico, their collection and marketing are felonies and crimes against biodiversity and can be punished by up to nine years in prison and fines of up to MXN \$50,000 (US \$3,960) days of salary.

This major confiscation was carried out by federal prosecutors assigned to the Specialized Unit on Investigation of Crimes Against Planned Environment and Special Laws of the Deputy Attorney General in a joint operation with PROFEPA-PGR-PF.

Source: PROFEPA, profepa.gob.mx

Sawmills Shut Down in Michoacán



© Juan Pratgijnestos / WWF-Canon

On April 7, 2010, in Michoacán, Mexico, inspectors from PROFEPA temporarily shut down two clandestine sawmills in the town of Los Llanos. They did so with the support of the Mexican Army, after the sawmill officials were unable to present documentation showing legal possession of the existing wood and storage sites, or proper permits for forest raw materials. PROFEPA temporarily seized quantities of pine (*Pinus*), sacred fir (*Abies religiosa*) and parota (*Enterolobium cyclocarpum*).

Source: PROFEPA, profepa.gob.mx

Wild Animal Specimens Seized at Taxidermy Business

Inspectors from PROFEPA in Michoacán, Mexico, seized a total of 57 specimens, parts and derivatives of wild animals on April 12, 2010, at a taxidermy business in Oaxaca. The owner could not prove legal ownership and origin, or permission to operate as a taxidermy business. Among the seized specimens, those species with a special protective status under Mexican law and/or covered by Appendix I of CITES included a boa constrictor (*Boa constrictor*), two coral snakes (*Micrurus spp.*), two parakeets atoleros (*Aratinga canicularis*), a yellow-cheeked parrot (*Amazona autumnalis*), tiger (*Panthera tigris*) and puma (*Puma concolor*) skins, six collared peccaries (*Tayassu tajacu*), an anteater skin (*Tamandua mexicana*), an owl (*Tyto alba*), a hawk (*Accipiter spp.*), a bobcat (*Lynx rufus*), a ringtail (*Basirinus spp.*) and crocodile skins (*Crocodylus spp.*).



© Anthony B. Rath / WWF-Canon

Source: PROFEPA, profepa.gob.mx

Traffic Police Seize Illegal Wildlife Products in China

On April 30, 2010, traffic police in Fangchenggang City, Guangxi Province, seized 76 dead pangolins and 14 bear paws (*Ursus thibetanus*, CITES I) concealed in 10 white foam boxes in a coach from Dongxin (Guangxi) to Xiamen (Fujian). The average weight of each pangolin and each bear paw was about 7kg and 3kg, respectively. Both species are listed as national second-class protected animals in China. Neither the driver nor the passengers admitted to owning the items, which were transferred to the local wildlife conservation department.



© Meg Gawler / WWF-Canon

Source: China Wildlife Conservation Association, May 8, 2010

Ivory Confiscated in Thailand Airport

Customs officials in Thailand seized 296 elephant tusks totaling 1.4 tonnes and worth US \$2 million at Suvarnabhumi Airport on April 17, 2010. According to Komsiri Pinnarat, deputy director-general of customs, they acted on a tip from authorities in Qatar, where the shipment originated. The ivory was hidden in crates labeled as computer printers. CITES banned all international ivory trade in 1989, but a legal loophole in Thailand has led to a thriving local ivory industry.

Downloadable versions of many of TRAFFIC North America's reports can be found at: <http://www.worldwildlife.org/what/globalmarkets/wildlifetrade/item4912.html>, and at <http://www.traffic.org/>.

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