

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



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Standard taxonomy and nomenclature

ROLE OF STANDARD TAXONOMIC AND NOMENCLATURAL REFERENCES, AND AMENDMENT  
OF THE APPENDICES AS A CONSEQUENCE OF NOMENCLATURAL CHANGES

1. This document has been prepared by the Chairman of the Animals Committee.

Background

2. This discussion document is based on recent developments and decisions taken at the 12th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP12) as well as follow-up actions.
3. At CoP12 the Parties decided to transfer two bird species, *Amazona auropalliata* and *Amazona oratrix*, from Appendix II to Appendix I. A few days earlier, Parties had discussed and agreed to a proposal from the Nomenclature Committee (NC) to adopt a new standard reference for the whole order Psittaciformes [see document CoP12 Doc. 10.3 (Rev. 1)].
4. However, in this new reference, *Handbook of the Birds of the World*, Vol. 4, the two taxa *A. oratrix* and *A. auropalliata* are not considered as separate species but as subspecies of the polytypic species *A. ochrocephala*. The *Handbook of the Birds of the World* recognizes 10 subspecies: *A. o. auropalliata*, *A. o. belizensis*, *A. o. caribaea*, *A. o. nattereri*, *A. o. ochrocephala*, *A. o. oratrix*, *A. o. panamensis*, *A. o. parvipes*, *A. o. tresmariae* and *A. o. xantholaema*.
5. According to the former standard reference (Sibley and Monroe, 1990), *Amazona oratrix* incorporated *tresmariae* and *belizensis*. *Amazona auropalliata* incorporated *caribaea* and *parvipes*. *Amazona ochrocephala* incorporated *panamensis*, *xantholaema* and *nattereri*.
6. The change in the taxonomic standard reference has led to a split-listing, and six subspecies of *Amazona ochrocephala* are now included in Appendix I. These are: *A. o. auropalliata*, *A. o. belizensis*, *A. o. caribaea*, *A. o. oratrix*, *A. o. parvipes* and *A. o. tresmariae*.
7. Four subspecies of *Amazona ochrocephala* are included in Appendix II. These are: *A. o. nattereri*, *A. o. ochrocephala*, *A. o. panamensis* and *A. o. xantholaema*.
8. The changes described above illustrate how complex the situation can be after nomenclatural and taxonomic changes. Based on these observations I would like to bring some general points to the attention of the Animals Committee.
9. Taxonomic and nomenclatural reference books are essential tools for communication not only among Parties, but also among scientists, NGOs, hobbyists, importers, exporters, Management Authorities and so on. A common terminology with taxonomy as the organizing principle is needed to communicate successfully. Experience shows that stakeholders in this issue – apart from scientists interested in

taxonomy – are rather conservative and do tend to stick to species classifications and denominations that have been used for some time and are readily understood.

10. Standard references should be based on a broad consensus among experts of different disciplines and, where possible, should reflect recent scientific research in more than one field. Therefore, reference lists for CITES should not be mainly reflections of the latest taxonomic research as this research tends to be based on the analysis of specific characters. Research on specific taxonomic groups, for example birds, has not only been carried out in recent years. Many studies in the past have yielded valuable results. Therefore standard references should, in my view, be rather conservative. Before new standard references are accepted and become established, they need to be carefully examined to see what changes they contain and what impact such changes on the implementation of CITES they will have. If taxonomy within CITES is indeed regarded as a working tool, then extending the list of synonyms might be more appropriate than continuously amending the denominations of species listed in the Appendices.
11. According to the normal procedure, stated under Article XV of the Convention, species can be included in, transferred between or deleted from the Appendices only after relevant proposals have been submitted in due time, evaluated by the Parties and the CoP has formally accepted the proposal by a two-thirds majority. In the follow-up to taxonomic changes adopted by the Parties with only a simple majority, new taxa can be included in, transferred between or deleted from the Appendices without equivalent documentation and without the evaluation and decision process, i.e. contrary to the required procedure, in fact contrary to the Convention (Article XV). Matters are even more confusing when the issue of reservations is taken into consideration: Parties may have entered a reservation in regard to a taxon now amended or might intend to enter a reservation after the taxonomic amendment. The new nomenclatural situation may warrant the evaluation of such reservations, resulting in their withdrawal, part-withdrawal or renewal, or the entering of a new reservation. In my opinion this is not regulated satisfactorily at the moment.
12. Nomenclatural changes and the consequent amendments to the Appendices have a great practical and administrative impact: legislation may need to be amended or adjusted, Identification Manual sheets may need to be revised, instruction and training documentation must be revised, information material must be reissued, computer software must be adjusted, data files must be corrected or re-written, administrative procedures must be changed and often complex administrative problems need to be solved (e.g. specimens may have been imported, registered and filed under the 'old' denomination and will now have to be re-exported under a new denomination). Often Parties are not aware or are not made aware of the consequences of something that comes in the inconspicuous disguise of a 'taxonomic change'.

#### Recommendations

13. In view of all this, I suggest the following:
  - a) Reviewing the issue of the requirement to adapt the CITES Appendices to the most recent scientific nomenclatural references;
  - b) Reviewing the terms of reference of the NC;
  - c) Restructuring and formalizing the process whereby CITES nomenclature is changed, i.e. reviewing the process of adaptation of new or updated nomenclatural reference;
  - d) In particular reviewing the process whereby the new reference is presented to the CoP (format, deadlines, documentation pertaining to the new taxa, and extensive information regarding the impact on implementation); and
  - e) Clarifying the issue of reservations with regard to taxa that have been amended as a consequence of the acceptance of new nomenclatural reference.

#### References

Del Hoyo, J.; Elliott, A.; Sargatal, J. (eds) 1997: Handbook of the Birds of the World. Vol. 4. Barcelona, Lynx Edicions.

Sibley, C.G.; Monroe, B.L., 1990: Distribution and Taxonomy of Birds of the World. New Haven, London; Yale University Press

#### Comments from the Secretariat

1. The Secretariat is of the opinion that it would be more appropriate for the NC or the Standing Committee to address the issues raised in this document.
2. The Secretariat is not aware of a requirement to adapt the CITES Appendices to the most recent scientific nomenclature references as suggested in paragraph 13 a). In the Secretariat's experience, the NC has been able to find a good balance between the need to adapt the Appendices to reflect taxonomic and scientific progress, and the need for a pragmatic and reasonably conservative approach when considering nomenclatural amendments to the Appendices.
3. The terms of reference of the NC are contained in Annex 3 of Resolution Conf. 11.1 (Rev. CoP12). A revision of these terms of reference or the *modus operandi* of the Committee, as suggested in paragraph 13 b), c) and d) could be initiated by the NC (or by any Party) if decided useful by this Committee and presented for consideration by the Conference of the Parties. The Secretariat is of the opinion that it is not apt for the Animals or Plants Committee to review the terms of reference of the NC.
4. The Secretariat wishes to point out that Resolution Conf. 12.11 on standard nomenclature provides that the *Checklist of CITES species*, compiled by UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre, 2001 and its updates accepted by the NC has now been adopted as the standard reference for species included in the Appendices. The process mentioned in paragraph 13, d) is therefore no longer applicable.
5. The Secretariat is not aware of outstanding issues regarding reservation that need to be clarified, as suggested in paragraph 13 e). It believes that the matter of how the nomenclatural changes relate to reservations is quite clear.
6. Finally, it notes that paragraph 11 wrongly suggests that nomenclature changes should or could be treated in the same manner as amendments to the Appendices. It is obvious that the original intent of a listing may not be changed by a change in the standard nomenclature, and this is reflected in Resolution Conf. 12.11 [see e.g. paragraph h)].