

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



Seventeenth meeting of the Plants Committee
Geneva (Switzerland), 15-19 April 2008

Identification matters

PROGRESS REPORT ON THE IDENTIFICATION MANUAL

1. This document has been prepared by the Secretariat.
2. In accordance with Resolution Conf. 11.19, paragraph g), the Secretariat herewith provides a report on the progress made with the production of the Identification Manual.
3. The database of published sheets of the Identification Manual has been completed and is accessible on the CITES website in:

English (www.cites.org/eng/resources/ID/index.php);
French (<http://www.cites.org/fra/resources/ID/index.php>); and
Spanish (www.cites.org/esp/resources/ID/index.php).

Sheets are available for viewing in PDF format files.

4. This database provides a transition between the previous paper-based version and a future fully searchable electronic format. However, there is still much that can be done to improve the user-friendliness of the identification manual and to complete its content. Since the 14th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (The Hague, 3-15 June 2007), the Secretariat has been exploring ways by which the Identification Manual can evolve.
5. The Identification Manual was started in 1977 when few other sources of identification materials were available, and before the existence of the World Wide Web. Part of the information in Identification Manual sheets is now found in Web-accessible databases (such as the CITES species database maintained by UNEP-WCMC and the CITES trade database managed by UNEP-WCMC on behalf of the CITES Secretariat), which are in turn linked to other data sources such as external databases and image banks.
6. The Identification Manual differs from other sources in that it describes the characteristics of each species that allows their identification and gives information on similar species, identification keys for higher taxon groups, and the description of parts and derivatives.
7. Amendments to the Appendices, changes in taxonomy and improved knowledge on distribution, populations and new trade figures invariably mean that Identification Manual sheets quickly become outdated. The Secretariat does not have the manpower or financial resources to update every identification manual sheet, or complete a substantial number of new sheets, which in turn limits the usability of the Identification Manual.

8. While several Parties have submitted excellent Identification Manual sheets in a timely manner, the reality is that the number of submissions remains limited, and sheets for many species recently included in the Appendices still need to be produced. The Secretariat therefore proposes to modernize the Identification Manual by transforming the sheet-based database into a Web-based database that would be fully linked to other CITES databases, and in which the identification segment for each species or group of species could be created and modified by users in an approach known as a "Wiki". A Wiki is a type of computer software that allows users to create, edit and link Web pages.
9. Giving users the ability to create and modify Identification Manual sheets would shift the burden of work and provide a mechanism to update identification-related content easily. Information on taxonomy, status, trade, etc. would be provided by existing CITES databases and would not be modifiable by users.
10. The Secretariat has contracted the UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC) to determine the feasibility of converting the existing CITES Identification Manual into a partial Wiki format. UNEP-WCMC is considering, *inter alia*, the software requirements to create and operate such a database; the steps required to convert the existing sheets into a Wiki format (with certain data elements linked to or derived from other databases); copyright matters, and recommendations on a policy for adding, editing and reviewing material.
11. A demonstration of a Wiki format CITES Identification Manual will be presented during the meeting.
12. The Secretariat is grateful for the support received from Parties for the preparation of Identification Manual sheets.