

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



Twenty-eighth meeting of the Animals Committee  
Tel Aviv (Israel), 30 August-3 September 2015

Interpretation and implementation of the Convention

Species trade and conservation

Snake trade and conservation management (Serpentes spp.)

REVIEW OF STUDIES AND ACTIVITIES  
[DECISION 16.103, PARAGRAPHS A) AND D)]

1. This document has been prepared by the Secretariat.
2. The Conference of the Parties adopted at its 16th meeting (CoP16, Bangkok, 2013) a number of interconnected decisions on *Snake trade and conservation management (Serpentes spp.)*. These include the following:

***Directed to the Secretariat***

16.102 *The CITES Secretariat shall, where appropriate in consultation with the Standing Committee:*

- a) *subject to external funding, hire independent consultants in liaison with local scientists, and local research and academic institutions to:*
  - i) *undertake a study of production systems for Asian snakes listed in CITES Appendix II and the use of source codes; and develop guidance to assist Parties in monitoring and controlling captive-breeding operations and other production systems, including information to assess their biological feasibility and, where possible, economic viability (i.e. whether it is financially viable for commercial facilities to produce and export specimens as permitted by national authorities);*
  - ii) *compile information and develop guidance that can assist Parties in the making of non-detriment findings, management systems for wild populations and the establishment of export quotas for Appendix-II snake species in trade, by undertaking relevant research, consulting with relevant experts, examining suitable examples and case-studies, and building on the results of the International Expert Workshop on CITES Non-Detriment Findings (Cancún, 2008) and recommendations on the making of non-detriment findings from the Conference of the Parties;*
  - iii) *undertake a study of one or more high-value snake species in the pet trade (e.g. unique colour or morphological forms, or range-restricted endemics) to determine the impacts on wild populations of legal and illegal harvest for international trade, and to provide information required for making non-detriment findings for trade in these species; and propose actions to enforce the Convention as it relates to trade in these species; and*

- iv) *undertake a study on methodologies to differentiate between wild and captive-bred CITES-listed snakes in trade, including parts and derivatives, ensuring that the work is carried out in line with recommendations of the Standing Committee concerning source;*
- b) *issue a Notification to the Parties encouraging Parties to engage with interested institutions to investigate the possibility of forensic identification of specimens of CITES-listed snakes in trade, and requesting Parties to inform the Secretariat about the results of such engagement;*
- c) *inform Parties of the results of the International Trade Centre (ITC) study on trade in python snakes in Asia, the UNCTAD Biotrade Initiative's Working Group on reptile skin sourcing, when these become available, and other relevant studies and information;*
- d) *present the outcomes of the activities mentioned in paragraphs a) and b) above, together with its recommendations, to the Animals Committee for review at its 27th or, as appropriate, 28th meeting, and make the final results available on the CITES website following review and approval by the Standing Committee pursuant to Decision 16.105;*
- f) *subject to external funding, conduct one or more interdisciplinary workshops for CITES and other relevant authorities and stakeholders of range States of Asian snake species in international trade on:*
  - i) *the use of guidance for monitoring and controlling captive-breeding operations and other production systems, as agreed by the Standing Committee pursuant to Decision 16.105;*
  - ii) *the use of guidance for making non-detriment findings and establishing export quotas for Appendix-II snake species in trade;*

**Directed to the Animals Committee**

16.103 *The Animals Committee shall:*

- a) *review the results of the activities indicated in Decision 16.102, paragraphs a) to c), as well as the results of the ITC study and other relevant studies on trade in python snakes in Asia and UNCTAD Biotrade Initiative's Working Group on reptile skin sourcing, when available; and, based on these studies and reports, develop guidance and recommendations for consideration by the Standing Committee;*
- d) *report on the status of this work at the 65th and 66th meetings of the Standing Committee.*

3. At its 27th meeting (AC27, Veracruz, April 2014), the Secretariat explained that it had secured funding for undertaking the four studies mentioned in paragraph a) of Decision 16.102, but that these had not been initiated yet. It planned to issue a Notification to the Parties in compliance with paragraph b) of the same decision shortly after AC27. The Secretariat was therefore not able to provide the outcomes of the activities mentioned in paragraphs a) and b) of Decisions 16.102, with its recommendations, to the Animals Committee for review (see document [AC27 Doc. 19.1](#)).
4. At AC27, the Animals Committee established a working group on snake trade and conservation management, of which the recommendations in document [AC27 WG4 Doc. 1](#) were adopted with the addition of "as a template" at the end of the first bullet point of recommendation 3.
5. Concerning the studies mentioned in Decision 16.102, the working group was mandated to work intersessionally to review the content and make appropriate recommendations for consideration at the present meeting, in particular regarding:
  - Production systems for Asian snake species listed in CITES Appendix II (use of source codes; guidance for monitoring and controlling production systems);
  - Guidance for the making of non-detriment findings for trade in Appendix-II snake species;
  - Methodologies to differentiate between wild and captive-bred CITES-listed snakes in trade;
  - High-value snake species in the pet trade; and

- Forensic identification of specimens of CITES-listed snakes in trade.

#### Outcome of activities mentioned in Decision 16.102, paragraph a)

6. Following AC27, the Secretariat, with generous funding from Switzerland and the European Union, concluded contracts with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the Boa and Python Specialist Group of the Species Survival Commission of IUCN (IUCN-SSC) to undertake the four studies mentioned in paragraph a) of Decision 16.102.
7. Pursuant to Decision 16.102, paragraph a), i), the IUCN-SSC Boa and Python Specialist Group produced an assessment of the commercial production of CITES-listed snake species in Viet Nam and China. The study examines closed cycle production systems and makes recommendations for their improvement and the future management of CITES-listed snakes entering trade. The synopsis of the study can be found in Annex 1. The complete study is available as information document AC28 Inf. 1.
8. Pursuant to Decision 16.102, paragraph a), ii), the IUCN-SSC Boa and Python Specialist Group compiled information and produced guidance on making non-detriment findings for trade in snakes. The summary report of the study can be found in Annex 2. The complete study is available as information documents AC28 Inf. 2 and 3.
9. Pursuant to Decision 16.102, paragraph a), iii), the IUCN-SSC Boa and Python Specialist Group produced an assessment of the impact of the pet trade on five snake species included in Appendix II. The study summarizes the general context and impact of the pet trade on CITES Appendix II-listed snake species and outlines key findings, conclusions and recommendations for each of the five snake species discussed. The summary report of the study can be found in Annex 3. The complete study is available as information documents AC28 Inf. 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8.
10. Pursuant to Decision 16.102, paragraph a), iv), the IUCN-SSC Boa and Python Specialist Group produced a study on methodologies for differentiating between wild and captive-bred CITES-listed snakes. The study describes available methods, examines their potential limitations and discusses their utility and applicability for snakes in trade. The synopsis of the study can be found in Annex 4. The complete study is available as information document AC28 Inf. 9.
11. In May 2015, the Secretariat circulated drafts of the studies described in paragraphs 7 to 10 above to the working group for its review, and comments have been incorporated in the current versions.
12. In June 2015, Austria informed the Secretariat about a study on reptiles similar to the one on methodologies for differentiating between wild and captive-bred CITES-listed snakes. This study is in German, but should be published in English in the future. The study, entitled “Die Unterscheidung von Wildfängen und Nachzuchten bei Reptilien: Ihre Bedeutung für den Artenschutz” (Benyr, 2014), is available from the website of the Austrian Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management at <http://www.bmlfuw.gv.at/umwelt/natur-artenschutz/cites/berichte/citeswildentnahme.html>.
13. Concerning the studies referred to in Decision 16.102, paragraph c), the Secretariat issued Notification to the Parties No. 2014/024 of 2 June 2014, which informed Parties of the results of the ITC study on trade in python skins and UNCTAD’s Biotrade Initiative Working Group on reptile skin sourcing.

#### Outcome of activities mentioned in Decision 16.102, paragraph b)

14. In compliance with the instructions in Decision 16.102, paragraph b), the Secretariat issued Notification to the Parties No. 2014/024, which encouraged Parties to engage with interested institutions to investigate the possibility of forensic identification of specimens of CITES-listed snakes in trade, and requested Parties to inform the Secretariat about the results of such engagement. At the time of writing of this document (June 2015), no such information from Parties had been received by the Secretariat.

#### Observations by the Secretariat concerning activities in Decision 16.102, paragraphs a) and b)

15. The Secretariat considers the studies undertaken under Decision 16.102, paragraph a) comprehensive and useful, and generally supports the recommendations contained therein.

16. In accordance with Decision 16.102, paragraph d), and after review and approval by the Animals Committee and the Standing Committee, the Secretariat will make the final results of the activities in Decision 16.102, paragraphs a) and b) available on the CITES website. The studies could be linked to the Virtual College, while those mentioned in paragraphs 8 and 9 above could also be disseminated on the new non-detriment findings (NDF) portal that the Secretariat is developing pursuant to Resolution Conf. 16.7 on *Non-detriment findings*.
17. The Secretariat is of the opinion that the studies mentioned in paragraphs 7 and 10 above are pertinent to the ongoing discussions in the Animals and Standing Committees on the implementation of the Convention relating to captive-bred and ranched specimens (Decisions 16.63 to 16.66), and recommends that the current versions and findings be conveyed to, and fully considered by the relevant working groups of the Committees.
18. Furthermore, in accordance with paragraph f) of Decision 16.102, the Secretariat plans to conduct an interdisciplinary workshop for CITES and other relevant authorities and stakeholders of range States of Asian snake species in international trade to promote and test the final results of the activities mentioned above, specifically the guidance for monitoring and controlling captive-breeding operations and other production systems, and the guidance for making non-detriment findings and establishing export quotas for Appendix-II snake species in trade. The Secretariat has secured some funding to this effect.
19. Concerning the implementation of Decision 16.102, paragraph b), the Secretariat recommends no further action at this point, noting that Parties or institutions interested in examining forensic identification techniques for specimens of CITES-listed snakes in trade can engage in collaboration at any time.

#### Recommendations

20. In compliance with Decision 16.103, paragraphs a) and d), the Animals Committee is invited to review the activities and studies mentioned above, as well as the observations by the Secretariat in paragraphs 15 to 19, and, based on these studies and other information, develop guidance and recommendations for consideration by the Standing Committee at its 66th meeting. The working group on snake trade and conservation management may wish to provide its comments and findings in this regard.
21. The Animals Committee may wish to ask the consultants of the Secretariat to provide an oral summary of their studies and recommendations.