

Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)

CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) is an international agreement between governments with an objective of the preservation of the planet's plants and animals.

Students preparing for the [IAS Exam](#) or any other Government Exam should be well aware of this topic. CITES is related to the Environment and Ecology section of the General Studies paper-3 of the [UPSC Syllabus](#).

What is CITES?

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) is an international agreement between governments that aims to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants should not threaten their survival.

- Cites was conceptualised in 1963 at a meeting of the [\(IUCN\) International Union For Conservation Of Nature](#).
- It came into force in 1975 and consists of 183 member-countries till date that abide by CITES regulations by implementing legislation within their own borders to enforce those regulations.
- Located in Geneva, Switzerland, the CITES is administered by the [United Nations](#) under its UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme) Wing.
- The Convention of Parties to CITES is the supreme decision-making body of the Convention and comprises all its Parties.
- The last CoP (17th) was held at Johannesburg (South Africa), in 2016. India hosted CoP (3rd) in 1981.
- Although CITES is legally binding on the Parties, it does not take the place of national laws.
- Rather, it provides a framework to be respected by each Party, which has to adopt its own domestic legislation to ensure that CITES is implemented at the national level.

CITES Classification or Appendices

CITES classifies plants and animals into three categories, based on how threatened they are.

- Roughly 5,600 species of animals and 30,000 species of plants are protected by CITES against over-exploitation through international trade.

They are listed under the three CITES Appendices.

Appendix	Description	Examples of Species
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Appendix 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Species that are in danger of extinction Commercial trade is prohibited. Permits are required for import and export. Trade permitted just for research only if the origin country ensures the trade won't harm the species' chance of survival. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Asiatic lions and tigers (tiger skin trade). Sea turtles, gorillas, lady slippers orchids (most species), etc. Total 931 species on the list.
Appendix 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Species that aren't facing imminent extinction but need monitoring so that any trade doesn't become a threat. Trade permits obtained legally and only if the origin country ensures that its harvesting and trade won't harm the species' chance of survival. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> American Alligators (Alligator skin trade) Paddlefish, Mahogany, corals, etc. Total 34,419 species on the list.
Appendix 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Species that are protected in at least one country. Regulations for these species vary, but typically the country that requested the listing can issue export permits, and export from other countries requires a certificate of origin. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Honeybadger (medicinal or bushmeat purpose) Walrus, Map turtles, certain beetles, etc. Total 147 species on the list.

- Species may be added to or removed from Appendix I and II, or moved between them, only by the Conference of the Parties.
- However, species may be added to or removed from Appendix III at any time and by any Party unilaterally.

Also, read [Project Elephant - List Of Elephant Reserves In India](#).

CITES India

- India is a CITES Party since **1976**.
- Due to its extreme diversity, India is recognized all over the world for harbouring up to 7-8% of all the species recorded by CITES.
- Out of 34 global biodiversity hotspots in the world, India has 4 of them: Western Ghats, Sundaland, Himalayas and Indo-Burma region.
- As an active CITES Party, India prohibits the international trade of endangered wild species.
- India has placed several measures to control the threats from invasive alien species.
- This is done by regulating the trade by export certificates and import permits.

Also read: [Wildlife Protection Act, 1972](#)

UPSC Questions related to CITES

Is CITES legally binding?

- CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) is an international agreement between governments.
- Even though participation is voluntary, the member countries have agreed to be bound by the Convention known as the Parties.
- CITES are legally binding on the Parties but it does not take the place of national laws.

What is a CITES Permit?

- The **Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)** is an international agreement between governments that aims to ensure that **international trade** in specimens of wild animals and plants should not threaten their survival.
- The international trade is regulated by providing permits and certificates for import and export issued only when certain conditions are met.

Is India a member of CITES?

- India is a CITES Party since 1976.
- Due to its extreme diversity, India is recognized all over the world for harbouring up to 7-8% of all the species recorded by CITES.
- As an active CITES Party, India prohibits the international trade of endangered wild species.