

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

The full form of CITES is the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. CITES is an international agreement between governments with the objective of the preservation of the planet's plants and animals by ensuring that the international trade in their specimens does not threaten their survival. It was adopted in 1963 and entered into force in 1975.

CITES Latest News

The 19th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora or CITES COP19 was held in Panama City (14th - 25th November 2022). India submitted three proposals to CITES COP19 for stricter protection of its native species - the Jeypore Indian gecko, the red-crowned roofed turtle and Leith's softshell turtle.

What is CITES?

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.

To read about [Important Environment Conventions and Protocols](#), check the linked article.

CITES Classification or CITES Appendix

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 that are mentioned below:

Appendix	Description	Examples of Species
CITES Appendix-I	<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.
CITES Appendix-II	<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.

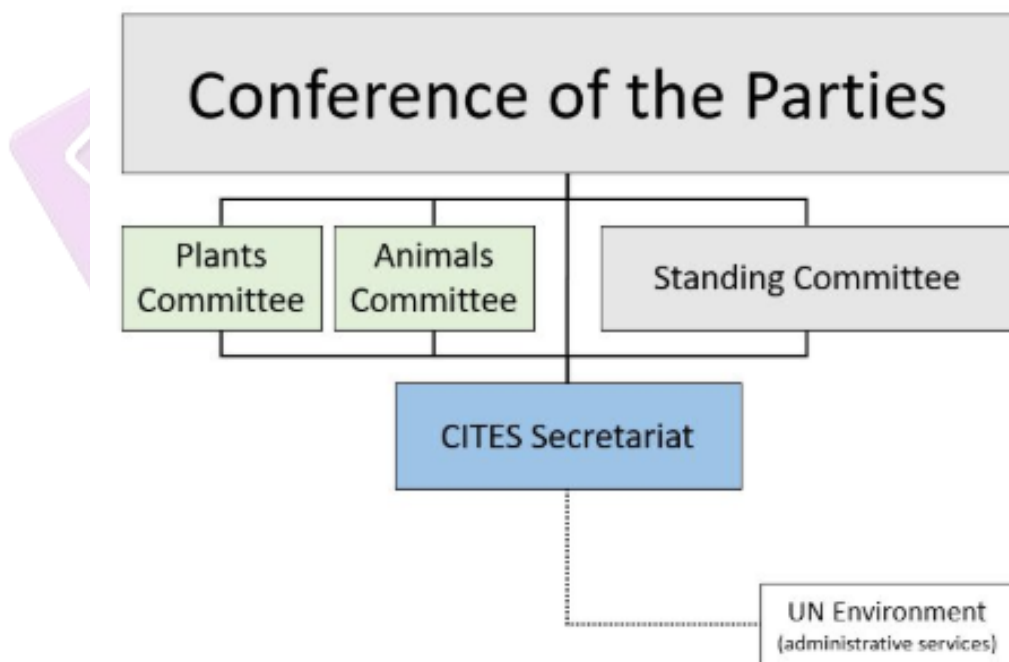
CITES Appendix-I II

- 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.
- Honeybadger (medicinal or bushmeat purpose)
- Walruses, Manatees, certain turtles, 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.

Structure of CITES

The following image from the CITES official website (<https://www.cites.org/>) gives the structure:



CITES COP

The Conference of the Parties (COP) meet every two to three years. The **latest COP was CITES COP18** that took place in August 2019 in Geneva, Switzerland. **CITES COP3 took place in India** in 1981 in New Delhi.

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.

CITES COP19



Image source: [cites.org](https://www.cites.org)

India's proposal for transferring Leith's Softshell Turtle (*Nilssonia leithi*) and red-crowned roofed turtle (Batagur Kachua) from Appendix II to Appendix I has been adopted. The CITES Appendix I listing will ensure that legal international trade of the species does not take place for commercial purposes. It will ensure the better survival of the species. Both turtle species are critically endangered and are illegally traded internationally as pets, food and traditional medicine.

- Nilssonia has been categorised as critically endangered by the IUCN. It is a large fresh-water, soft-shelled turtle which is endemic to peninsular India and inhabits rivers and reservoirs.
- India's proposal to add a gecko (*Cyrtodactylus jeyporensis*) to Appendix II which would imply that international trade will require permits, has also been adopted. The Jeypore Indian gecko is endangered. The wild reptile species is found in the Eastern Ghats and is known to be present in four locations including southern Odisha and northern Andhra Pradesh.
- India's proposals were among a total of 12 for greater protection of freshwater turtles and ultimately all 12 turtle proposals were adopted at COP19. It was highlighted that turtles are among the world's most threatened vertebrate groups.

Dalbergia sissoo (North Indian Rosewood or Shisham)

In CITES COP17 held in Johannesburg, South Africa in 2016, all species of Genus Dalbergia were included in Appendix II, thereby requiring to follow CITES regulations for the trade of the species.

- The species Dalbergia sissoo is not threatened and is found in abundance. However, concerns were expressed regarding the challenges in distinguishing different species of Dalbergia in their finished forms. In absence of a clear technology for distinguishing the finished wood, COP19 did not agree to delist the Genus Dalbergia from CITES Appendix II.
- Due to this restriction exports of furniture and handicrafts made of Dalbergia sissoo from India have been continuously falling from an estimated 1000 crore Indian Rupees (~129 million USD) per annum before the listing, to 500-600 crore Indian Rupees (~64 to 77 million USD) per annum after the listing.
- Relief was given in terms of weight which will help the Indian artisans to a great extent and boost the export of articles. After sustained deliberations by Indian representatives, it was agreed upon that any number of Dalbergia sissoo timber-based items can be exported as a single consignment in a shipment without CITES permits if the weight of each item of the consignment is less than 10kg. Also, it was agreed that for the net weight of each item only timber will be considered and any other material like metal, etc. will be ignored. This is a great relief for the Indian artisans and furniture industry.

Other Highlights of CITES COP19

- At COP19, the proposals to list a variety of marine species in Appendix II of the convention were adopted including 104 shark and ray species consisting of Hammerhead sharks, Guitar fish and Requiem sharks like the Blue Shark and three Indo-Pacific sea cucumbers.
- At COP19, two songbirds from South and Southeast Asia - the White Rumped Shama (found from Southern India to Indonesia) was added to Appendix II and the straw-headed bulbul was moved from Appendix II to Appendix I.

India at COP18/2019

India proposed to boost the protection of the following animal species:

- Smooth-coated otter & small-clawed otter
- Indian star tortoise
- Tokay gecko
- Wedgefish
- Indian rosewood

India wants to re-list two otter species, star tortoise in CITES Appendix I, and Tokay gecko and Wedgefish in CITES Appendix II.

UPSC Questions related to CITES

Q. 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.

Q. 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.

Q. 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.