Conservation matters: CITES and new herp listings

The red-tailed knobby newt (*Tylototriton kweichowensis*) now has a higher level of protection under CITES.
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What are the recent CITES listing changes and what do they mean for herp owners? Dr. Thomas E.J. Leuteritz from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service explains.

Did you know that your pet herp may be a species of protected wildlife? Many exotic reptiles and amphibians are protected under CITES, also known as the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. Initiated in 1973, CITES is an international agreement currently signed by 182 countries and the European Union (also known as Parties), which regulates international trade in more than 35,000 wild animal and plant species, including their parts, products, and derivatives.

The aim of CITES is to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival in the wild. In the United States, the implementation of CITES is the responsibility of the Secretary of the Interior, who has tasked the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) as the lead agency responsible for the Convention's implementation. You can help USFWS conserve these species by complying with CITES and other wildlife laws to ensure that your activities as a pet owner or seller are lawful and supportive, recognizing the threats that harm wild populations.

➤ It is not just live animals that are covered by CITES, but parts and derivatives too, such as crocodile skins that feature in the leather trade. Plants and timber are also included.
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How does CITES work?

Species protected by CITES are included in one of three lists, referred to as Appendices, according to the degree of protection they need: Appendix I includes species threatened with extinction and provides the greatest level of protection, including restrictions on commercial trade. Appendix II includes species that, although currently not threatened with ➤

extinction, may become so without trade regulations to ensure trade is legal and sustainable. Appendix III includes species protected by at least one country that needs assistance from other Parties to monitor its international trade.

Changes to Appendices I and II must be proposed by a Party at a meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP) in accordance with the CITES Trade and Biological Criteria (as set out under Resolution Conf. 9.24) and agreed to by consensus or by a two-thirds majority of the Parties present and voting. In contrast additions to Appendix III can be done by individual Parties at any time.

The bizarre leaf-nosed lizard (*Ceratophora tennentii*) has just been listed on Appendix I.
Photo courtesy reptiles4all/www.shutterstock.com

Newly-protected reptiles and amphibians

Every 2-3 years, the member countries to CITES hold a meeting of the CoP to review, discuss, and negotiate changes in the management and control of trade in the various animal and plant species covered by the agreement. The U.S. public has input to these decisions through our Federal Register comment process (https://www.federalregister.gov/).

At the recent 18th Conference of the Parties (CoP18), held in Geneva, Switzerland, last August (originally scheduled for Colombo, Sri Lanka in May/June but relocated because of the terrorist bombings on April 21, 2019), CITES Parties decided to increase protections for many herp species. They included agamid lizards, geckos, spiny-tailed iguanas, Iranian viper, Vietnamese freshwater turtles, an African tortoise, and Asian newts, as indicated below. Herps represented a third of all 57 species proposals considered at the CoP (including one crocodile species that is not covered here). These new CITES listings subsequently came into effect on November 26, 2019.

The lists below include species adopted at CITES CoP18 (https://cites.org/eng/cop/18/prop/index.php).

The Rio Aguan Valley spiny-tailed iguana (*Ctenosaura melanosterna*) - one of the new species that now features on CITES Appendix II.
Photo courtesy reptiles4all/www.shutterstock.com

Species added to Appendix I (12):

Reptiles (12)

- ***Ceratophora erdeleni*** **(Erdelen's horn lizard)**
- ***Ceratophora karu*** **(Karunaratne's (horn) lizard)**
- ***Ceratophora tennentii*** **(leaf-nose lizard)**
- ***Cophotis ceylanica*** **(pygmy lizard)**
- ***Cophotis dumbara*** **(Knuckles pygmy lizard)**
- ***Lyriocephalus scutatus*** **(hump-nosed lizard)**
- ***Gonatodes daudini*** **(Grenadines clawed gecko)**
- ***Cuora bourreti*** **(Bourret's box turtle)**
- ***Cuora picturata*** **(Vietnamese box turtle)**
- ***Mauremys annamensis*** **(Annam leaf turtle)**
- ***Geochelone elegans*** **(Indian Star tortoise)**
- ***Malacochersus tornieri*** **(pancake tortoise)**

An increasingly rare sight - Annam leaf turtles in the wild, where they are declining fast because of hunting pressure. The natural habitat of this species is a small area in the central part of Vietnam. It was even feared to be extinct in the wild for a time, and now has the highest level of protection under CITES, although this does not protect these turtles from being hunted in their homeland, as CITES only impacts on international trade. Photo courtesy jurra8/www.shutterstock.com

Species added to Appendix II (76):

Reptiles (36)

- **Ceratophora aspera* (rough-nosed horn lizard)
- **Ceratophora stoddartii* (rhino-horn lizard)
- *Goniurosaurus araneus* (Vietnamese leopard gecko)
- *Goniurosaurus catbaensis* (Cat Ba tiger gecko)
- *Goniurosaurus bawanglingensis* (Bawangling leopard gecko)
- *Goniurosaurus hainanensis* (Hainan cave gecko)
- *Goniurosaurus huuliensis* (Huulien tiger gecko)
- *Goniurosaurus kadoorieorum* (Kadoories' cave gecko)
- *Goniurosaurus kwangsiensis* (Guangxi cave gecko)
- *Goniurosaurus liboensis* (Libo leopard gecko)
- *Goniurosaurus lichtenfelderi* (Lichtenfelder's tiger gecko)
- *Goniurosaurus luii* (Chinese leopard gecko)
- *Goniurosaurus yingdeensis* (Yingde leopard gecko)
- *Goniurosaurus zhelongi* (Zhe-long's leopard gecko)
- *Goniurosaurus zhoui* (Zhou's leopard gecko)
- *Gekko gecko* (tokay gecko)
- *Paroedura androyensis* (Grandidier's Madagascar ground gecko)
- *Ctenosaura acanthura* (Veracruz spiny-tailed iguana)
- *Ctenosaura alfredschmidti* (Campeche spiny-tailed iguana)
- ***Ctenosaura bakeri* (Bakers spiny-tailed iguana)
- *Ctenosaura clarki* (Mexican spiny-tailed iguana)
- *Ctenosaura conspicuosa* (San Esteban spiny-tailed iguana)
- *Ctenosaura defensor* (Yucatán spiny-tailed iguana)
- *Ctenosaura flavidorsalis* (yellow-backed spiny-tailed iguana)
- *Ctenosaura hemilopha* (Baja California spiny-tailed iguana)
- *Ctenosaura macrolopha* (Sonoran spiny-tailed iguana)
- ***Ctenosaura melanosterna* (Rio Aguan Valley spiny-tailed iguana)
- *Ctenosaura nolascensis* (San Pedro Nolasco spiny-tailed iguana)
- *Ctenosaura oaxacana* (Oaxaca spiny-tailed iguana)
- ***Ctenosaura oedirhina* (De Queiroz's spiny-tailed iguana)
- ***Ctenosaura palearis* (Guatemalan spiny-tailed iguana)
- *Ctenosaura pectinata* (Mexican black spiny-tailed iguana)
- *Ctenosaura praeocularis* (Southern Honduran spiny-tailed *iguana)*
- *Ctenosaura quinquecarinata* (five-keeled spiny-tailed iguana)
- *Ctenosaura similis* (common spiny-tailed iguana)
- *Pseudocerastes urarachnoides* (spider-tailed horned viper)

➤ The bizarre spider-tailed horned viper from Iran, whose tail has a bulb-like tip which resembles an insect and attracts unsuspecting birds that the snake can then catch, was the only serpent given increased protection under CITES this time. Photo courtesy reptiles4all/www.shutterstock.com

*Note: * these two species of Ceratophora included in Appendix II with a zero export quota for wild specimens traded for commercial purposes ** these four species of Ctenosaura have been on Appendix II since 2010 (CoP15)*

Amphibians (40)

- *Echinotriton chinhaiensis* (Chinhai spiny newt)
- *Echinotriton maxiquadratus* (mountain spiny newt)
- *Paramesotriton aurantius* (orange-colored warty newt)
- *Paramesotriton caudopunctatus* (spot-tailed warty newt)
- *Paramesotriton chinensis* (Chinese warty newt)
- *Paramesotriton fuzhongensis* (Wanggao warty newt)
- *Paramesotriton labiatus* (spotless smooth warty newt)
- *Paramesotriton longliensis* (Longli warty newt)
- *Paramesotriton maolanensis* (Maolan warty newt)
- *Paramesotriton qixilingensis* (Qixiling warty newt)
- *Paramesotriton wulingensis* (Wulin warty newt)
- *Paramesotriton yunwuensis* (Yunwu warty newt)
- *Paramesotriton zhijinensis* (Zhijin warty newt)
- *Paramesotriton deloustali* (Vietnam warty newt)
- *Paramesotriton guangxiensis* (Guangxi warty newt)
- *Tylototriton anguliceps* (angular-headed newt)
- *Tylototriton anhuiensis* (Anhui knobby newt)
- *Tylototriton asperrimus* (Black knobby newt)
- *Tylototriton broadoridgus* (Sangzhi crocodile newt)
- *Tylototriton dabienicus* (Dabie Mountain crocodile newt)
- *Tylototriton hainanensis* (Hainan knobby newt)
- *Tylototriton himalayanus* (Himalayan salamander)
- *Tylototriton kweichowensis* (red-tailed knobby newt)
- *Tylototriton liuyangensis* (Liuyang crocodile newt)
- *Tylototriton lizhenchangi* (Mangshan crocodile newt)
- *Tylototriton ngarsuensis* (Ywangan crocodile newt)
- *Tylototriton notialis* (Khammouan crocodile newt)
- *Tylototriton panhai* (Panha's crocodile newt)
- *Tylototriton podichthys* (Luang Phabang crocodile newt)
- *Tylototriton pseudoverrucosus* (Southern Sichuan crocodile newt)
- *Tylototriton pulcherrimus* (none)
- *Tylototriton shanjing* (emperor newt)
- *Tylototriton shanorum* (Taunggyi crocodile newt)
- *Tylototriton taliangensis* (Taliang knobby newt)
- *Tylototriton uyenoi* (Chiang Mai crocodile newt)
- *Tylototriton verrucosus* (Himalayan (crocodile) newt)
- *Tylototriton vietnamensis* (Vietnamese crocodile newt)
- *Tylototriton wenxianensis* (Wenxian knobby newt)
- *Tylototriton yangi* (Tiannan crocodile newt)
- *Tylototriton ziegleri* (Ziegler's crocodile newt)

➤ One of amphibians which have just been transferred to CITES Appendix II - the Vietnam warty newt (*Paramesotriton deloustali*).
Photo courtesy reptiles4all/www.shutterstock.com

Species added to Appendix II (76):

Invertebrates (15)

- *Poecilotheria chaojii* (none)
- *Poecilotheria fasciata* (Sri Lankan ornamental tarantula)
- *Poecilotheria formosa* (Salem ornamental tarantula)
- *Poecilotheria hanumavilasumica* (Rameswaram ornamental tarantula)
- *Poecilotheria metallica* (Gooty sapphire ornamental tarantula)
- *Poecilotheria miranda* (none)
- *Poecilotheria ornata* (fringed ornamental tarantula)
- *Poecilotheria rajaei* (none)
- *Poecilotheria regalis* (Indian ornamental tarantula)
- *Poecilotheria rufilata* (red slate ornamental tarantula)
- *Poecilotheria smithi* (yellow-backed ornamental tarantula)
- *Poecilotheria striata* (Mysore ornamental tarantula)
- *Poecilotheria subfusca* (ivory-billed ornamental tarantula)
- *Poecilotheria tigrinawesseli* (Wessel's tiger ornamental tarantula)
- *Poecilotheria vittata* (ghost ornamental tarantula)

All invertebrates whose CITES status has changed are species of ornamental/parachute spiders/tarantulas (*Poecilotheria* sp.). They include the Gooty sapphire ornamental tarantula shown here.
Photo courtesy Dan Olsen/www.shutterstock.com

Appendix I or II vs III?

A species is unilaterally listed in Appendix III by a country in the native range of that species, at the request of that country. In contrast, a species is listed in Appendix I or II by consensus or a 2/3 vote of the Parties. For the export of specimens of an Appendix III species, the Management Authority in the country of export need only determine that the specimens were not obtained in contravention of that country's laws for the protection of animals and plants. In contrast, the export of specimens of an Appendix II species requires that the CITES authorities in the country of export determine that the specimens were acquired legally and that their export will not be detrimental to the survival of the species.

For a complete list of species protected under CITES, please check the CITES Species Database at https://www.speciesplus.net/

Higher protection for the world's most trafficked tortoise

The Indian star tortoise (*Geochelone elegans*) has the unfortunate distinction of being considered the world's most trafficked tortoise. Numerically, this species is the single most commonly seized species of tortoise or freshwater turtle worldwide, representing around 11% of all global seizures involving freshwater turtles and tortoises. Illegal trade in the Indian star tortoise is most common in Thailand, however additional recent seizures occurred in Germany, Indonesia, the Netherlands, the Philippines, Slovakia, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

In most cases, seizures are made from air travelers arriving from Asia, as well as some from express mail parcels sent from Asia. Studies have shown that these seizures represent only the tip of a far larger iceberg. This medium-sized tortoise is endemic to parts of India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka and is in rapid decline due to heavy poaching pressure, particularly for the international live trade to meet demand for the exotic pet market because of its beautiful shell pattern.

The proposal to transfer the Indian star tortoise from Appendix II to Appendix I was accepted by consensus by the Parties (with support from both India and Sri Lanka). This Appendix I listing will provide the highest level of international protection. Captive–bred specimens of this Appendix I species will need to come from CITES registered and approved breeding facilities. For additional information see: https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/cop/18/prop/060319/E-CoP18-Prop-36.pdf .

Star tortoises are currently subject to high levels of illegal international trade. Photo courtesy World Animal Protection.

What do the new listings mean to herp owners?

Unless they are moving animals across an international border, these listings will have little effect on the average hobbyist or pet owner. If you do own any of the newly-listed species and plan to travel internationally with your pets, please refer to the USFWS website "Personal Pets" section found here: https://www.fws.gov/international/Permits/by-activity/personal-pets.html

As a pet owner and consumer, you should make sure that you always purchase herps from a reputable seller/breeder/dealer. Ask questions. Where did the animals come from? Were the animals legally acquired? If the juveniles are obviously captive-bred, were the parents legally acquired? Be an educated consumer and help protect the animals in the trade. Keep a record of your purchase with receipts in a permanent file so that you will be prepared to apply for permits in the future, if needed.

CITES plays an invaluable role in helping to monitor international trade in wildlife and wildlife products through its system of permits. Photo courtesy muratart/www.shutterstock.com

What about importers and exporters?

Animal importers and exporters need to obtain proper legal documentation before importing and/or exporting CITES-listed species. The backbone of CITES is the regulatory permit system that facilitates international cooperation in conservation and trade monitoring. Permits are issued only if a country's CITES Authorities determine that trade is legal and sustainable, meaning that it does not threaten the species' survival in the wild.

The use of standardized permit forms allows inspection officials at ports of export and import to verify quickly that CITES-listed specimens are properly documented. Appendices I, II, and III species require applicants to submit standard application forms and fees to USFWS in order to obtain CITES export or import permits to move specimens across international borders.

Permit systems also facilitate the collection of species-specific trade data, which are used in the creation of annual reports. These data help to determine trends in trade and ensure that trade in wildlife is sustainable. This trade monitoring has created a substantial body of information on the management and use of CITES species worldwide. Importers and exporters, please make sure you apply for the proper permits before shipping your animals. Thank you for your assistance in helping to conserve these species for future generations and traders.

One of the best-known herp species now featured on CITES Appendix II is the tokay gecko, see here in its Asian homeland, where it is now being heavily hunted for the medicinal trade. This has led to a serious decline in its numbers in many countries within its native range. Photo courtesy kunmom/www.shutterstock.com

Further information

To learn more about the herp proposals that the United States submitted for consideration to CoP18, please refer to the proposal for pancake tortoises, available at https://www.fws.gov/international/cites/cop18/pdfs/cop18-proposal-malacochersus-tornieri.pdf, and the the proposal for the tokay gecko, available at https://www.fws.gov/international/cites/cop18/pdfs/cop18-proposal-gekko-gecko.pdf. For a complete overview of USFWS submissions to CoP18, visit https://www.fws.gov/international/cites/cop18/us-submissions.html.

For all proposals submitted to CoP18 see https://cites.org/eng/cop/18/prop/index.php. For details about permit application forms, visit www.fws.gov/international/permits/do-i-need-a-permit.html. For details about permit procedures for freshwater turtles, visit https://www.fws.gov/international/permits/by-species/freshwater-turtles.html. For more information about CITES and what species are found on the Appendices, please refer to www.cites.org/. If you have questions or seek further information, email managementauthority@fws.gov with questions about permits, or email scientificauthority@fws.gov with questions about the species.

Dr. Leuteritz is a herpetologist and Chief of the Branch of Conservation Science Policy, Division of Scientific Authority for CITES in the International Program of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. He works on reptile and amphibian trade issues pertaining to CITES among other issues. He also has extensive experience conducting field research on tortoises in Africa.