

The Cat Specialist Group at CITES CoP13

by Kristin Nowell¹

I attended the 13th Conference of the Parties to CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora), held in Bangkok, Thailand, from 2 to 14 October 2004, as part of the IUCN delegation, to represent the SSC Cat Specialist Group.

There were five separate cat-related issues at the Conference.

1. Kenya's proposal to transfer the African lion *Panthera leo* from Appendix II to Appendix I (CoP13 Prop. 6)

Prior to CoP13, the African Lion Working Group, a network of specialists associated with the Cat SG, discussed this proposal in their email listserv. While concern was expressed over what appears to be a significant declining trend in the African lion population over the past two decades, the Group believed that the primary causes are not trade-related. The international wildlife trade monitoring network TRAFFIC recommended that the proposal be rejected, based on the IUCN analysis of the proposal.

I worked closely with fellow Cat SG and ALWG members Craig Packer (delegation of Tanzania) and Philip Stander (CITES Secretariat, MIKE

Programme) to organize a meeting of lion range states, primarily in East and Southern Africa (SADC), together with Kenya. There was strong opposition from most lion range state governments to the Kenya proposal, which they felt had been submitted without effective consultation with other range states. The delegation of the European Union (EU) provided their conference room for the meeting. The result of the meeting is that Kenya agreed to withdraw the proposal.

In its withdrawal speech, Kenya expressed support for a proposal by the SADC countries to hold a series of regional lion conservation workshops. The Cat SG was recognized as being a potential organizer of the workshops. IUCN SSC should follow up on interest expressed by the EU in funding these workshops and other lion conservation projects.

2. The USA's proposal to remove the bobcat *Lynx rufus* from Appendix II (CoP13 Prop. 5)

All felid species are included in CITES Appendices I and II. In the IUCN analysis of this proposal, Cat SG members expressed concern that removal of the bobcat would create a loophole for unregulated trade in skins and other parts (e.g. bones) of similar felid species. TRAFFIC recommended the proposal

be rejected. Although the government of Canada expressed support for the proposal, the government of Mexico (the only other range state) did not. The USA withdrew the proposal, requesting that the CITES Animals Committee include the genus *Lynx* in its periodic Review of the Appendices, to evaluate the appropriateness of current listings.

3. Conservation of and trade in Asian big cats (CoP13 Doc. 28)

Following up on reporting requirements in a resolution adopted at the previous CITES meeting (Res. Conf. 12.5: Conservation of and trade in tigers and other Appendix I Asian big cat species), the CITES Secretariat prepared a report (CoP13 Doc. 28) which stated that in its opinion no CITES Party could be described as failing to make progress, and did not recommend any further action. The Cat SG worked with TRAFFIC and WWF on an intervention calling for stronger measures, but in the end this intervention was not made. The EU proposed a decision, which was adopted, requesting the CITES Secretariat to seek external funding to convene a meeting of relevant members of the CITES Tiger Enforcement Task Force to examine, in particular, the illicit trade in Asian big cats to facilitate exchange of enforcement information and coordination of investigations. IUCN SSC should

support the Secretariat in its efforts to fund the continued operation of the Task Force, with expanded focus on illegal trade in all Appendix I Asian big cats.

The CITES Secretariat report also highlighted concerns over the scale of illegal commercial trade in captive-bred Appendix I Asian big cats, particularly tigers. One operation singled out as needing increased scrutiny and regulation was Thailand's own Sri Racha Tiger Zoo. On October 6, the Thai Forestry Police charged Sri Racha with breeding tigers illegally, identifying over 300 tigers present at the facility without proper permits. In addition, the intention to develop a national DNA database of captive tigers in Thailand was announced. In a separate but equally dramatic development, tigers at the facility began to perish from the avian

flu virus, and the Thai Disease Control Department ordered a number of additional tigers culled (over 70 tigers total). The working hypothesis is that the tigers contracted the virus from contaminated raw chicken meat, although this has not yet been conclusively demonstrated.

4. Leopard *Panthera pardus* export quota increase for Namibia (CoP13 Doc. 19.1)

Namibia's request to increase its annual leopard export quota from 100 to 250 was adopted.

5. Leopard *Panthera pardus* export quota increase for South Africa (CoP13 Doc. 19.2)

South Africa's request to increase its annual leopard export quota from 75 to 150 was also adopted. South Africa

agreed to take account of concerns expressed by TRAFFIC regarding the need to improve management and reporting of its leopard export quota.

Resources

Links to documents relevant to the CITES 13 cat issues are on the CAT website: www.felidae.org including CITES official documents, IUCN Analyses and TRAFFIC Recommendations, text of proposal withdrawal speeches, and news reports.

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