

CITES COP20

Samarkand, Uzbekistan

November 24th to December 5th 2025

WHAT THE LATEST DECISIONS MEAN FOR ENDANGERED SPECIES



WHAT IS CITES?

CITES stands for the **Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora**.

It's an international agreement that makes sure trading of wild animals and plants doesn't threaten the survival of any species.

It places legally binding rules on anyone taking plants and animals, as well as things made from their parts, into and out of countries.

Every three years, CITES hosts a **Conference of the Parties (CoP)**.

This is a big global meeting, bringing together...

- Governments from CITES member countries
- Observers from other countries
- UN agencies, conservation NGOs and scientists
- Local communities
- Businesses involved in wildlife trade

The goal is to hear everyone's voice and make decisions that protect wildlife whilst also considering people's livelihoods.

WHY WE CARE ABOUT COP20

(AND WHY YOU SHOULD TOO)

What is biodiversity?

Biodiversity is a measure of how many different species and how many individuals there are in an ecosystem.

An ecosystem with high biodiversity will be home to lots of individuals belonging to lots of different species.

Why is biodiversity important?

Nature provides us with many resources, including...

- food
- breathable air
- medicines
- materials

...and much more.

Biodiversity is essential in building the ecosystems that we rely on.

In 2025, the U.S., a founding Party and largest contributor to CITES, pulled its funding, leaving the future of the convention uncertain.

Why is CoP20 important?

Human activities are driving a global decline in biodiversity but environmental issues are slipping down the political agenda in some countries.

The success of CoP20 could have major impacts on the future of global biodiversity.

APPENDICES

One of the main tasks for the conference is allocating species to different categories, stated in appendices of the CITES agreement.

Appendix I- Top Protection

Species listed in Appendix I are **endangered**.

Restricting trade is considered essential to the survival of the species.

Trade of these species or any of their derivatives, such as fur or ivory, is completely banned in most circumstances.

Appendix II- Controlled Trade

These species **may be threatened** if trade isn't limited.

Trade is closely monitored, requiring permits to be issued for imports and exports.

Most species protected under CITES fall into this appendix.

Appendix III- National Protection

Any CITES party can list a species without the need for consultation or approval, in order to restrict trade within their own country.

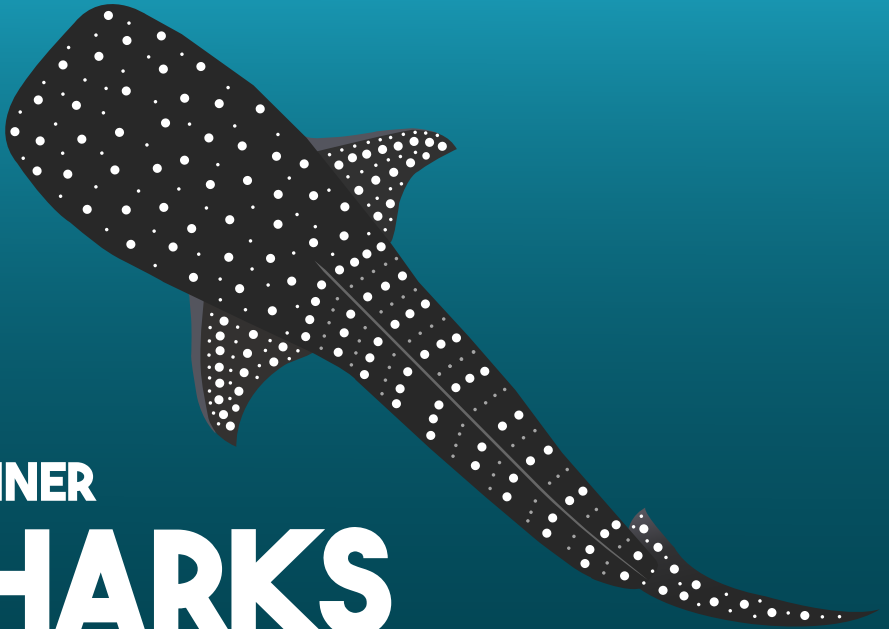
The species does not receive international protection.

KEY OUTCOMES FROM COP20

The Winners and Losers

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WINNER SHARKS & RAYS

70 species of sharks and rays gained new protections.

Whale sharks, oceanic whitetip sharks and ALL species of manta and devil ray were moved to Appendix I.

Wedgefishes and the giant guitarfish are protected by zero export quotas.

Several other species were introduced to appendix II.



This means they cannot be sold internationally.

WINNER

RHINOCEROS

Diceros bicornis; Ceratotherium simum simum

Proposals to begin allowing legal trade of rhino horn were rejected.

All current protections for rhino species remain in place.

WINNER

HORNBILLS

Nine species of African hornbill were introduced to Appendix II.

Hornbills are traded as exotic pets and used in some traditional medicines.²



COMING OUT ON TOP

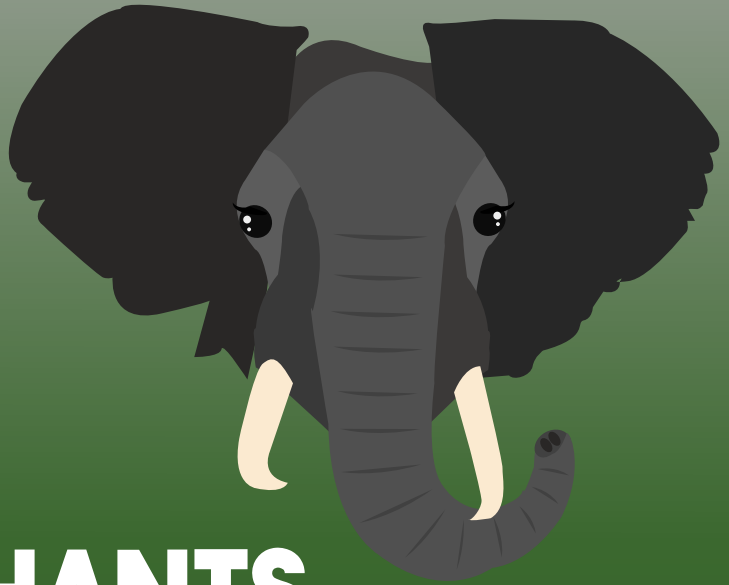
Other notable new entries to Appendix I:

- Golden-bellied mangabey
- White-backed vulture
- Rüppell's vulture
- Galápagos marine iguana
- Galápagos land iguanas
- Home's hinge-back tortoise

Other notable new entries to Appendix II:

- Linnaeus's two-toed sloth
- Hoffman's two-toed sloth
- Dorcas gazelle
- Mount Elliot leaf-tailed gecko
- Ringed thin-tail gecko
- School shark
- Smoothhound sharks

*Note: these lists highlight key examples.
Many other species were added too.*



LOSER

ELEPHANTS

Live elephants will now be allowed to be exported from Zimbabwe, South Africa, Namibia, and Botswana (e.g., to zoos).

Elephant leather products can also be exported, which may incentivise poaching.

The justification for this decision is that many people in these countries feel they are now becoming over populated with elephants.

Human-elephant conflict is increasing locally.

It has been suggested that an alternative solution could be to create an environment where elephants can move more freely.³

LOSER

SAIGA ANTELOPE

Saiga tatarica

Saiga antelope became victims of their own success.

Threats from habitat loss, poaching, disease and climate change left their population decimated at around 21,000 individuals in the 1990s.

Anti-poaching and conservation initiatives have led to such an increase that in 2024 they numbered around 2.8 million in Kazakhstan alone.⁴

As a result, at CoP20, it was assessed that their zero export quota could be lifted in Kazakhstan, allowing trade in saiga horn to resume, but leaving populations vulnerable.



An illustration of an eel swimming, shown in profile, facing left. It has a long, slender body with a dark olive-green dorsal side and a lighter, yellowish-brown ventral side. A small, dark eye is visible near the head. The eel's body is slightly curved, and its tail is visible on the right side.

LOSER EELS

Anguilla rostrata; Anguilla japonica

A proposed change that would bring all freshwater eel species into Appendix II was rejected.

European eels are already listed in Appendix II, but identification against its Japanese and American counterparts is very difficult. This makes restrictions hard to enforce. A European eel labelled as Japanese or American could easily go unquestioned.

Anguilla eels spend large parts of their life cycle migrating across the high seas (international waters). Here, they are not protected by national laws, so CITES protection is essential for global population control.

The proposal was rejected as it was considered to threaten livelihoods and fishing industries in some countries such as Japan.

NOT SO LUCKY

Other notable species rejected for uplisting:

- Rattlesnakes
- Tarantula species (*Grammostola rosea* and look-alikes) initial broad proposal—mostly rejected, later only *G. rosea* was accepted
- Sea cucumber

Other notable species removed from Appendix II:

- Bontebok— deleted due to strong recovery in South Africa

Other notable species downlisted from Appendix I to Appendix II:

- Guadalupe fur seal
- Parlatore's podocarp (plant)

Note: these lists highlight key examples only.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Whilst CITES is a legally binding agreement, actual enforcement relies on individual parties upholding and enforcing the agreement.

Decisions adopted at the CoP do not take effect immediately.

Around 90 days after CoP20:

Amendments to the CITES Appendices enter into force and become legally binding for Parties.

2025-2028:

Countries update national laws, permit systems and begin enforcement.

By CoP21 (expected 2028):

Parties review implementation, assess conservation impacts, and consider new or revised proposals based on evidence between the CoPs.

LEARN MORE

CITES Secretariat

Official decisions, appendices amendments, notifications to Parties, and implementation guidance

Earth Negotiations Bulletin (IISD)

Detailed daily reports and the official CoP20 summary, including negotiations and voting outcomes.

CITES Appendices

Updated species listings and annotations

SOURCES

1. Keck, F., Peller, T., Alther, R. et al. (2025) The global human impact on biodiversity. *Nature* 641, 395–400.

2. Tinsman, J et al., Woodward, A., Su, S., et al. (2025) Intense international exploitation of African hornbills necessitates urgent conservation measures, including CITES listing. *Biological Conservation* 308.

3. Gyuse, T. (2025) Corridors, not culls, offer solution to southern Africa's growing elephant population, *Conservation news*. Available at: <https://news.mongabay.com/2025/12/corridors-not-culls-offer-solution-to-southern-africas-growing-elephant-population/> (Accessed: 13 January 2026).

Saiga: The World's weirdest antelopes, Flora and Fauna International. Available at: <https://www.fauna-flora.org/species/saiga/> (Accessed: 13 January 2026).