

CITES Report Urges India to Halt Wildlife Imports Pending Stronger Checks

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CITES Report Latest News

- A CITES verification mission has advised India to halt **imports of critically endangered species** — **including** gorillas, orangutans, chimpanzees, and snow leopards — until stronger checks and due diligence measures are implemented.
- The report warned of illegal harvesting of wild animals falsely declared as captive-bred and asked India to provide credible evidence to the CITES Secretariat in Geneva proving its compliance with global wildlife trade safeguards.

About CITES

- The **Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)**, a global treaty with 185 members, regulates international trade in protected species.

Structure and Mechanism

- Species protected under CITES are classified into three Appendices:
 - **Appendix I:** Species threatened with extinction; trade permitted only in exceptional circumstances.
 - **Appendix II:** Species not necessarily threatened but whose trade must be controlled to avoid overexploitation.
 - **Appendix III:** Species protected in at least one country that has asked other Parties for assistance in controlling trade.
- Trade in CITES-listed species requires export and import permits issued by designated national CITES authorities in each member country.

India and CITES

- India joined CITES in 1976, and no international wildlife trade is permitted without export and import permits issued by designated CITES authorities.
- The Directorate of Wildlife Preservation under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) serves as India's CITES Management Authority.
- CITES implementation in India aligns with the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, which governs the trade, acquisition, and possession of wildlife species and derivatives.

CITES Mission Flags Gaps in India's Wildlife Import Procedures

- A CITES verification mission has urged India to suspend imports of critically endangered species — such as gorillas, orangutans, chimpanzees, and snow leopards — until it strengthens due diligence and verification systems to prevent illegal wildlife trade.
- The mission warned against the illegal capture of wild animals falsely declared as captive-bred and asked India to provide evidence of compliance to the CITES Secretariat in Geneva.

Background: Inspection Triggered by Gujarat Zoo Imports

- At a CITES Standing Committee meeting in Geneva (February 2025), member countries raised concerns about wildlife imports to the Greens Zoological Rescue & Rehabilitation Center (GZRRRC) in Jamnagar, Gujarat, operated by Vantara.
- This led to a CITES inspection mission, which also visited the Radha Krishna Temple Elephant Welfare Trust (RKTEWT).

Key Findings of the Report

- The mission found that while all imports had valid CITES permits, questions remained about:
 - The true origin of animals,
 - The accuracy of source (captive-bred) and purpose (zoo) codes, and
 - The extent of India's due diligence in verifying imports.
- Under India's **Wildlife Protection Act**, zoos can only acquire or transfer animals from other recognised zoos.

- However, many imports came from commercial breeding facilities, not zoos — raising concerns about wild-caught animals being mislabelled as captive-bred.

Animal Holdings and Facility Standards

- The CITES Secretariat noted that both facilities – GZRRC and RKTEWT – maintain exceptionally high welfare standards and that their representatives denied buying any animals.

Contradictory Records on Czech Republic Imports

- The Czech CITES authority told the Secretariat that animals sent to GZRRC were sold, not rescued, contradicting India's claim.

Questionable Origins of Animals from Africa and South America

- Three African elephants imported from Tunisia were found to be wild-caught from Burkina Faso.
- 363 animals, including primates, crocodilians, and anteaters, exported from Guyana, were marked as wild (source code W) and for zoos (purpose code Z) — **raising concerns of misclassification.**

Imports from Unlikely or Unverified Sources

- The report listed multiple imports via the UAE claiming “captive-bred” origins from countries with no breeding programs — such as:
 - Chimpanzees from Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait
 - Bonobo from Iraq
 - Gorilla from Haiti
 - Cheetahs from Syria
- It also noted imports of Appendix-I species under “confiscation” (code I) — including jaguars, ocelots, margays, jaguarundis, chimpanzees, orangutans, and cheetahs — with unknown origins from Mexico and the UAE.

CITES Recommendations for India

- The **CITES Secretariat** recommended that India:
 - **Review and strengthen its import procedures** urgently to ensure authenticity of captive-bred claims.
 - **Verify all flagged imports** with **source or transit countries** — including **Congo, Germany, Guyana, Iraq, Mexico, Syria, and the UAE** — to confirm origins.
 - **Take corrective action** if animals were found to be **sourced from the wild** under false captive-bred claims.

Next Steps and Reporting Deadline

- The CITES Standing Committee, meeting in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, on November 23, will review India's case.
- The Secretariat has asked India to take corrective measures and submit a detailed compliance report within 90 days.

Source: IE | CNBC | CITES

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