

Nations to Meet in Panama to Tackle Wildlife Trade

Center Staff to Attend to Advocate for Elephants, Sea Cucumbers, Hippos, Turtles

By [Center For Biological Diversity](#)

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Officials from around the globe will convene in Panama City Nov. 14 for the triennial [conference](#) of the parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species. The CITES treaty regulates trade in imperiled or potentially threatened animals and plants, and plays a critical role in combating wildlife exploitation, a key driver of the extinction crisis.

Center for Biological Diversity staff are attending the conference to [advocate for species](#). [Proposals](#) at the CITES meeting include dangerous bids to open the trade in [elephant ivory](#) and [rhino horn](#). Either proposal would be disastrous: Savannah elephant populations declined by more than 50% over the past 75 years, and poaching threatens rhinos because of continued high demand for their horns.

The [meeting](#), informally called "CoP19," will also decide whether more than 230 species of reptiles and amphibians — including 36 turtle species native to the United States — will receive CITES protections. More than 47% of known amphibians and 21% of known reptiles [are threatened](#) with extinction, and trade restrictions are needed to save turtles, glass frogs and rattlesnakes from the pet and meat trades.

Proposals to protect 44 Mexican species, including musk turtles and horned lizards, will also be on the agenda, along with proposals to regulate trade in candy cane sea cucumbers, hippos, hammerhead sharks, aquarium fish and many other species.

Nations will also negotiate future work on behalf of pangolins, elephants, leopards, seahorses, lions, rhinos and more. In addition, parties will discuss using the treaty's compliance mechanism against Mexico for its failure to stem the vaquita porpoise's rapid march toward extinction.

“We’re suffering a global extinction crisis, and CITES has a crucial role to play in fighting wildlife trade’s contribution to extinction risk,” said Tanya Sanerib, attorney at the Center. “Thousands of struggling species can’t afford to wait any longer for CITES’ critical protections. Our planet’s wondrous creatures deserve to be respected, not commodified.”

The 2019 Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services assessment found that without transformative change, 1 million species could be lost in the coming decades. The global community must collectively renew CITES’ mission of protecting species from overexploitation due to international trade and ensure the treaty is fully funded and implemented to effectively respond to the biodiversity crisis.

Center staff will be on the ground in Panama City starting Nov. 11. An intersessional meeting of CITES will take place Nov. 13 followed by the official start of the CITES’ Nineteenth Conference of the Parties on Nov. 14. The meeting is set to wrap up on Nov. 25. More information on key agenda items can be found in the Center’s briefing documents in [English](#) or [Spanish](#).

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