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CITES and Invasive Species

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The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) is not an especially useful tool for preventing the import of invasive species. This is not because the CITES convention is derelict in promoting wildlife conservation, but rather because this international convention deals almost exclusively with the conservation of wild populations in their native habitats¹ and not with what happens in destination countries.

There is only one current CITES resolution dealing with this subject: Res. Conf. 13.10 (Rev. CoP14) "Trade in Alien Invasive Species"². This short Resolution contains only the following three recommendations, directed to the Parties, that they should:

- a) consider the problems of invasive species when developing national legislation and regulations that deal with the trade in live animals or plants;
- b) consult with the Management Authority of a proposed country of import, when possible and when applicable, when considering exports of potentially invasive species, to determine whether there are domestic measures regulating such imports; and
- c) consider the opportunities for synergy between CITES and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and explore appropriate cooperation and collaboration between the two Conventions on the issue of introductions of alien species that are potentially invasive.

In contrast to many CITES Resolutions which contain much stronger language, this Resolution is largely declarative and not very authoritative.

In at least one case of which I'm aware, the CITES Convention has dealt constructively with an invasive species issue, as follows. In the 1990's the Animals Committee of the CITES Convention deemed that harvest of short-tailed macaques (*Macaca fascicularis*) from the

¹ Wijnstekers, W. 2007. The Evolution of CITES, 8th edition. Available to download free as an e-book from the CITES website at: <http://www.cites.org/eng/resources/publications.shtml>

² Res. Conf. 13.10 (Rev. CoP14) is available online at: <http://www.cites.org/eng/res/all/13/E13-10R14.pdf>

wild in Indonesia and Philippines was not sustainable. These countries then began to curtail their exports from the wild, and other Parties were directed to permit imports only from countries where the species is invasive. Following these steps, the source of exports of this species shifted during the late 1990's largely to Mauritius where the species is invasive and causes extensive damage to agriculture and to nature.

An additional aspect of CITES related to invasive species is the permit system. The CITES convention demands that for most of the CITES-listed species of wildlife, an export permit must be issued by the exporting country for international trade. According to CITES, only some species must also have import permits, however, many countries (including Israel) require an import permit for wildlife trade.

Because each Party to the CITES Convention must issue standardized export permits and report on them annually to the Secretariat, there is a rich database available on cross border transfers of wildlife, from which one can determine trade patterns. The standardized CITES permit system has enabled uniformity of the worldwide trade database which is monitored and analyzed regularly by the United Nations Environmental Program - World Conservation Monitoring Center³. This database could be useful for tracking cross-border movement of wildlife and could be used to reconstruct pathways of invasion of certain species.

³ The UNEP-WCMC CITES Trade database is online at: <http://www.unep-wcmc.org/citestrade/trade.cfm>