

108 Development of IUCN guidelines to effectively control the commercial pet trade in wildlife

RECOGNISING that commercial trade in wildlife as pets is a major threat to the conservation in the wild of multiple species, decimating numbers and leading to local – and in some cases global – extinctions;

FURTHER RECOGNISING that such trade is expanding to include increasing numbers of taxa from more geographical areas, facilitated by increasing access to formerly remote areas and global transportation systems and the Internet;

AWARE that trade in live wild animals includes large markets for household pets, specialised markets for their songs or other species-specific attributes, and high-end markets for rare and unusual species sought by collectors;

FURTHER AWARE that commercial trade in wildlife as pets can be legal or illegal, sustainable or unsustainable;

NOTING that such trade can pose high risks of pathogen spillovers, especially as viral loads increase along trade chains from wild source to urban markets, threatening the health of humans, wildlife and livestock;

NOTING that the risks that trade in wildlife as pets pose to biodiversity, human and livestock health can occur independently of whether the trade is legal or illegal, sustainable or unsustainable and vary among taxa;

EMPHASISING that some wildlife in the pet trade have a high potential to become invasive, posing threats to native wildlife populations, livestock and agriculture;

NOTING ALSO that the conditions under which wild animals for the pet trade are captured, held and transported impact animal welfare, and can lead to suffering and high levels of injury, disease, and mortality rates;

AWARE that such trade is often linked to organised crime and fuelled by corruption;

OBSERVING that, to date, efforts to regulate wildlife trade mainly rely on a “negative list” approach where trade is allowed by default, whether regulated or unregulated, until it is shown to threaten the species in the wild or health, and that this approach is failing many species;

NOTING FURTHER that a “positive list” approach, permitting trade only for species explicitly assessed and deemed to be safe and sustainable, offers a more precautionary and proactive framework for regulating commercial live pet trade; and

ACKNOWLEDGING the role of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) in regulating international trade of species;

The IUCN World Conservation Congress 2025, at its session in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates:

1. REQUESTS the Director General and the Species Survival Commission (SSC) to establish a task force to review the current state of the commercial pet trade in wildlife, including understanding the nature of the problem for biodiversity conservation, and the reasons why existing measures are not adequate and to develop guidelines that can be used by IUCN Members to manage that trade;

2. RECOMMENDS to the Director General and the SSC that these guidelines should support governments and other relevant actors to identify the conditions or taxa under which trade in wildlife as pets is responsible including considering risks of negative impacts on species populations, ecosystems, the health of humans, wildlife, livestock or agriculture, and of the introduction and spread of invasive species;

3. CALLS ON the Director General and SSC to ensure that the guidelines take into consideration:

- a. the need for a clear definition of commercial live pet trade;
 - b. that, to be acceptable, any commercial trade for pets should be legal, sustainable, traceable, equitable, safe and based on sound science, whether the animals in trade are sourced from the wild or captivity and should avoid or at least minimise sourcing of animals from the wild;
 - c. the possibility of recommending exclusion of all members of certain taxa from any commercial pet trade;
 - d. the possibility to include a positive listing of species which can be traded safely and sustainably as pets, to the exclusion of all others;
 - e. exemptions for conservation or scientific purposes;
 - f. potential further considerations on animal welfare;
 - g. the importance of appropriate capacity and resources for implementation of the guidelines; and
 - h. how to manage the livelihood, socio-economic, enforcement and welfare-related impacts of any legislative measures that might be put in place in response to the guideline recommendations;
4. URGES the Director General to promote the use of these guidelines by Members, governments and the private sector; and
5. URGES IUCN Members, especially State and Government Agency Members, and the private sector, to adopt and implement policies and legislation that are tailored to the situation and take into consideration the guidelines.