Title: Don’t overlook CITES criteria

Authors: D.W.S. Challender1,2,*, Michael Hoffmann3, Rachel Hoffmann4, Janet Scott2, Janine E. Robinson5, Patricia Cremona2, Craig Hilton-Taylor2, Richard K.B. Jenkins2, Kelly Malsch6, Dalia Conde7,8, Tom De Meulenaer9.

Affiliations:
1Department of Zoology and Oxford Martin School, University of Oxford, Zoology Research and Administration Building, 11a Mansfield Road, Oxford, United Kingdom.

2IUCN Global Species Programme, The David Attenborough Building, Pembroke Street, Cambridge CB2 3QZ, United Kingdom. Tel: +44 (0) 1223 331129.

3Conservation Programmes, Zoological Society of London, Regents Park, London, NW1 4RY, United Kingdom. Tel: +44 (0) 207 449 6536.

4IUCN Species Survival Commission, % IUCN Global Species Programme, The David Attenborough Building, Pembroke Street, Cambridge CB2 3QZ, United Kingdom. Tel: +44 (0) 1223 331129.

5Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology (DICE), School of Anthropology and Conservation, University of Kent, Canterbury CT2 7NR, Kent, United Kingdom.

6UN Environment World Conservation Monitoring Centre, 219 Huntingdon Road, Cambridge, CB3 0DL, United Kingdom. Tel: +44 (0) 1223 277314.

7Species360 Conservation Science Alliance, 7900 International Drive, Suite 1040, Bloomington, MN 55425, USA.

8Interdisciplinary Centre on Population Dynamics, Department of Biology, University of Southern Denmark, Campusvej 55, 5230 Odense M, Denmark.


*Corresponding author: email: dan.challender@zoo.ox.ac.uk, T: +44 (0) 7745 547585.

Main text:
Unsustainable international wildlife trade is a major conservation concern and CITES is a key tool for regulating it. Frank and Wilcove (Science, Policy Forum, 15 February 2019) assert that appropriate policy could be achieved by ensuring prompt inclusion of species in CITES that are
identified as threatened on The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™ [hereafter the ‘Red List’], at least in part by international trade. The authors claim that some 271 such species warrant inclusion in CITES Appendix I or II, which they characterize as a ‘backlog’ in need of clearing. The Red List currently informs decision-making in CITES, and we welcome the suggestion for closer interaction between the Red List and amendments to the CITES Appendices. However, the proposed approach of a near-automatic pathway overlooks the independent criteria and processes used for evaluating extinction risk on the Red List and for including species in CITES. The Red List uses objective categories and criteria with quantitative thresholds (e.g., based on population size and trends) and information on known or likely threats. Conversely, the listing of species under CITES, a legally-binding multilateral agreement, is a matter for its 183 Parties. CITES uses detailed biological and trade criteria against which to evaluate proposals to include species in its Appendices, and proposals can only be submitted by Parties. Crucially, species threatened on the Red List that can be ‘linked to’ international trade may not meet the criteria for inclusion in CITES, particularly when international trade is not a major threat. Prompt sharing of new or updated Red List assessments with the CITES Parties, and subsequent evaluation of species against the CITES listing criteria where appropriate, would ensure that international trade-threatened species are afforded the protection they need in a timely manner.