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Animal experts at UN-backed conference are ‘concerned’ about trade in animals and skins



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Animal experts from 50 countries meeting at a United Nations-backed conference today expressed concern about the sustainability of current levels of trade in snake skins used in luxury products and another 20 animal species used in biomedical research, the food industry or as pets.

More than 200 scientists conferring in the 25th meeting of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora ([CITES](#)) animal committee in Geneva agreed on technical recommendations to control animal trade in several species, CITES said in a [press statement](#).

The committee focused on high levels of trading in three snake species: the oriental rat snake, the reticulated python and the Indonesian cobra. They endorsed recommendations that include tightening the controls on snake-breeding facilities and the supply chain for skin trade.

Snakes from the forests and jungles of Asia play a vital role within their ecosystems. For example, if snakes were to disappear from the rice fields or other crop-producing landscapes of Asia, their prey, left behind with no predator to control their numbers, could have devastating effects on agricultural production, food security and national economies, CITES said.

Snakes are consumed for food, traditional medicines and skins. They are also sold as pets and found in expensive luxury leather goods and accessories, in the boutiques of Europe and North America.

The committee also examined volumes of international trade in the long-tailed macaque, originating mainly in China, Indonesia and Cambodia, which is used in biomedical research and which has experienced a rapid surge in international trade since 2004.

Carlos Ibero, chair of the animals committee, said “many of the individual species that have been reviewed and considered at this meeting occur in South-East Asia, which has become a sort of hotspot for wildlife trade. This is due to the fact that it is a region rich in biodiversity with an increasing prosperous population as well as many people relying on wildlife for their living.”

The committee also asked CITES, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization ([FAO](#)) and other international organizations to provide financial and technical support for the implementation of a three-phase work-plan focused on stock-assessment for sturgeons and paddlefish in the Caspian Sea.

CITES is an international agreement between governments. Its aim is to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival. It is administered by the UN Environment Programme ([UNEP](#)) in Geneva.

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