

WILDLIFE TRADE IN GREECE: HOW TO IMPROVE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION CITES REGULATIONS

G. VALAORAS, D.Sc.¹ and T. TZIOVARAS²

^{1,2} University of La Verne Athens, ¹14 Asklepiou St. GR-10680 Athens,
E-mail: valaoras@hol.gr.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

The Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) is an international agreement with over twenty-five years of activity in the effort to conserve the planet's biodiversity. It monitors trade of over 30,000 species of flora and fauna and their parts, which may be threatened with population declines due to commercial exploitation.

Greece has been a member of CITES since 1993, but as a member of the European Union, she has been subject to the EU regulations on wildlife trade since the mid-1980's. This paper describes certain legal, institutional and commercial aspects of wildlife trade in Greece, and points out failures to document, monitor and control this trade. Consequences of these failures are an overall weakening of the EU's enforcement of the treaty, since entry into Greece allows free transfer of wildlife and wildlife specimens to other EU countries.

Although the level of trade in Greece is low by comparison to other EU member states, there is a distinct rising trend in recent years. Some important CITES-listed species, such as tropical timber, are totally un-documented, because importers have not submitted import permits with the Greek CITES Management Authority.

A survey of the commercial sector dealing with wildlife trade was conducted in Athens from May to July 2002. Information was provided by the CITES Management Authority, from veterinarians, importers, retailers, wholesalers, businesses and magazine publishers. Through personal interviews and visits to shops and exhibitions, a partial assessment could be made of the level of awareness on the CITES regulations and the implementation of wildlife trade rules in Greece. The overall level of knowledge was rather low, and there was considerable reluctance to share information on the part of businesses and others related to commerce.

The CITES Management Authority provided statistics on part of the trade, but there are serious gaps in areas such as plants, tropical timber, fish, shells and fur parts. Similarly, statistics on the value of trade were not available. It does not appear that the Internet is used extensively by the wildlife trade sector, but this situation is evolving. In June 2003 TRAFFIC Europe (a wildlife monitoring network supported by the World Wide Fund for Nature and the World Conservation Union) launched a website which aimed to make wildlife traders aware of their responsibility.

Key words: wildlife trade, CITES, endangered species, trade data, conservation, biodiversity