

# STAR TORTOISE, OTTERS GET HIGHER PROTECTION AT CITES

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India's proposal to upgrade the protection of star tortoises (*Geochelone elegans*), the smooth-coated otter (*Lutrogale perspicillata*) and small-clawed otters (*Anoxyx cinereus*) in CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species on Wild Fauna and Flora) have been approved.

These species have been listed under Appendix I of CITES and will now enjoy the highest degree of protection as there will be a complete international ban enforced on their trade.

The upgradation was approved at the Conference of the Parties (COP18) held at Geneva.

Appendix I of CITES lists species that are the most endangered among CITES-listed animals and plants. "They are threatened with extinction and CITES prohibits international trade in specimens of these species except when the purpose of the import is not commercial, for instance for scientific research," the CITES website states.

'It's very encouraging to see that India's proposals received overwhelming support from other parties as well and got approved,' Saket Badola, head of TRAFFIC India told *The Hindu*. TRAFFIC is an international wildlife trade monitoring network.

Agni Mitra, deputy director, Wildlife Crime Control Bureau, Eastern Region, said that 90% of trade of star tortoises occurs as part of the international pet market.

The species is categorized as 'vulnerable' by the International Union of Conservation of Nature and a decline greater than 30% was predicted by 2025 if the exploitation continued or expanded.

In case of the small-clawed otter and smooth-coated otter, which are traded for their fur in the international market, numbers are also declining due to habitat loss.

Mr. Mitra welcomed the inclusion of Tokay geckos in Appendix II of CITES. "Tokay geckos are sold in the open in some south Asian countries. Its inclusion in CITES Appendix II will bring some restriction on the sale," he said.

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