

UN WILDLIFE CONFERENCE ENDS WITH PROTECTION FOR 500 SPECIES

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Fans of hippos, found in more than three dozen African countries and regulars in nature documentaries, had hoped the convention would ban commercial trade, but that proposal was not approved. File | Photo Credit: AP

An international conference on trade in endangered species ended Friday in Panama, with protections established for over 500 species.

The measures were approved by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, known by its initials as CITES.

The conference agreed to tighten trade regulations on sharks targeted by the fin trade and tiny frogs with translucent skin.

Global shark populations are declining, with annual deaths due to fisheries reaching about 100 million. The sharks are sought mostly for their fins, which are used in shark fin soup, a popular delicacy in China and elsewhere in Asia.

Over two weeks, the 184-nation gathering sought to combat trade in species facing extinction.

The international wildlife trade treaty, which was adopted 49 years ago in Washington, D.C., has been praised for helping stem the illegal and unsustainable trade in ivory and rhino horns as well as in whales and sea turtles.

The translucent or glass' frogs have been hit hard by habitat loss, diseases and their popularity in the pet trade, said Joaquín de la Torre, the international director for the International Fund for Animal Welfare, IFAW.

"We have been waiting for this for three years," De la Torre said of the protections. "They are very charismatic species." The conference also voted to restrict trade in South American freshwater turtles known as Matamoras, whose spikey, pre-historic appearance has made them popular among collectors.

CITES approved 46 of the 52 proposals presented, including restrictions on dozens of tree species.

Fans of hippos, found in more than three dozen African countries and regulars in nature documentaries, had hoped the convention would ban commercial trade, but that proposal was not approved.

The proposal to ban the hippo trade was opposed by the European Union, some African countries and several conservation groups, who argue many countries have healthy hippo populations and that trade isn't a factor in their decline.

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