



**Panthera Recommendations for
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[About Panthera](#)

Panthera is devoted to conserving the world's 40 species of wild cats and their vast ecosystems. Our team of biologists, law enforcement experts, data scientists and wild cat advocates combine cutting-edge research and technology to measure, monitor and recover species with proven techniques to promote coexistence and counter wildlife crime. In 35 countries, in collaboration with communities and partners, Panthera works to reduce or eliminate the most pressing threats to wild cats and preserve biodiversity so that both cats and people can thrive.

Big Cats at CITES SC78

Poaching and the illegal wildlife trade threaten all the big cats. Because of their critical roles in maintaining healthy ecosystems, the decline of these species poses a major threat to biodiversity worldwide. Panthera's recent research on the status of Indochinese leopards in Southeast Asia paints a grim picture for the future of the subspecies—now gone from Cambodia, Laos and Viet Nam—giving an even greater sense of urgency to the discussion on Asian big cats. An evolving trade in jaguar parts is galvanizing range State Parties to consider a new species-specific resolution and a range-wide jaguar initiative to secure the emblematic species of the Americas. Our recommendations on specific documents below are offered to assist with your decision-making, and we are available for additional information and discussion.

Item 40: [Illegal Trade in Cheetahs \(Acinonyx jubatus\)](#)

Panthera agrees with the Secretariat's conclusion that the matters directed to Parties in Decision 19.04 would benefit from further attention. Noting the very limited response to [Notification 2024/097](#), we remain concerned that effectively assessing the extent and trajectory of the trade continues to be a challenge. We support the Draft Decisions presented in the Annex to SC78 Doc. 40 encouraging Parties to strengthen legislation and enforcement and recommend that these also include the need to strengthen complementary activities and collaboration at source, transit and consumer sites.

Item 42: [CITES Big Cats Task Force](#)

Panthera was pleased to participate in the CITES Big Cats Task Force meeting in Entebbe, Uganda in 2023 and welcomes the promulgation of its [outcomes](#) as a foundational guide for Parties to increase and strengthen actions to mitigate illegal trade in big cats. We support the Draft Decisions in the Annex to SC78 Doc. 42 encouraging Parties to make every effort to fully



implement the strategies, measures and activities contained in the outcome document. The matters addressed by the Big Cats Task Force, as outlined in the [Terms of Reference](#), are dynamic in nature, as are the outcomes from the meeting, and indeed, the body of experts in the field, highlighting the need for the Task Force's work to be ongoing. We recommend that the Draft Decisions be amended to include additional meetings of the Big Cats Task Force to ensure Parties have access to the latest data, developments and guidance to inform their actions.

Regarding the discussion of the merits of a single resolution on illegal trade in all big cats, Panthera supports the recommendation of the Secretariat not to pursue such a resolution nor an amendment to Resolution Conf. 12.5 (Rev. CoP19) on Asian Big Cats. While we can see the potential value in such a resolution to strengthen collaboration among Parties and reduce duplication of work on common issues, as noted by the UK in [AC33 Doc. 34](#), we believe those are outweighed by the risk that a lengthy resolution containing common recommendations as well as species-specific actions for multiple species would be both difficult for Parties to follow and the Secretariat to monitor, with the potential for reduced reporting and implementation. We note the conclusion of the [Intersessional Working Group on Jaguars](#), assessing whether a separate resolution on jaguars would be appropriate, to recommend developing a specific draft resolution on jaguars. The group noted its “most important objective was making the recommendations accessible to Parties and for Parties to promote the necessary actions and strengthen the cooperation and coordination of all key actors to address common problems and avoid duplication of effort.”

Item 43.1 [Asian big cats \(Felidae spp.\) Report of the Secretariat](#)

Panthera appreciates the reports of many Parties on implementation of key decisions regarding Asian big cats, and the reporting specifically on leopards, as requested by SC77. The first quantitative assessment of leopards in Southeast Asia (Rostro-Garcia et al., 2024) found that estimated leopard densities were among the lowest ever reported for the species anywhere in the world, and that current enforcement measures were insufficient to tackle the threats to leopards, particularly snaring. The authors warned that, without scaled-up actions to curb demand for bushmeat and other wildlife products, poaching will likely continue to increase and expand. They concluded that “the overall prognosis for leopard in Southeast Asia is becoming increasingly bleak.” We are concerned that the limited responses by range States, both in the numbers of Parties reporting and the nature of the information provided, do not provide a clear picture of the scope of poaching and illegal trade in Asian big cats, the measures taken under Resolution Conf. 12.5 (Rev. COP19) to address it, or the impact on the species in the wild.

We acknowledge the inherent challenges in reporting and analysis for Parties and the Secretariat. Given the critical importance of robust, accurate, specific and up-to-date information to effective implementation of Resolution 12.5 (Rev. COP19), we believe that Parties would benefit from regular independent reporting such as required under [Resolution Conf. 9.14 on Conservation of and Trade in African and Asian rhinoceroses](#).



Panthera proposes that the Standing Committee adopt the recommendations in [SC78 Doc. 43.1](#) and consider the following additional recommendations:

1. Encourage Parties that are range States of Asian leopards to further report on the activities in their countries to better understand and mitigate the threats to this species;
2. Propose an amendment to Resolution Conf. 12.5 (Rev. COP19) to produce an independent report for each COP, subject to availability of funding, to improve decision-making and outcomes for Asian big cats.

Item 43.2: [Asian big cats \(Felidae spp.\) Asian Big Cats in Captivity](#)

Panthera welcomes the Secretariat's report on Asian big cats in captivity and the completion of the missions to the United States and China. We support the Draft Decisions on Tigers (*Panthera tigris*) in Captivity in Annex 2 to [SC78 Doc. 43.2](#).

Panthera invites the Standing Committee to take note of guidance on conservation breeding contained in Appendix I to the present document. This guidance was developed by a group of NGOs, including Panthera, with expertise in big cat zoos and sanctuaries, tiger trade, and animal welfare in response to comments during the Plenary discussion at AC33 on conservation breeding. In that discussion, Parties and Observers noted gaps in the available guidance, including its general nature, and expressed interest in having more specific guidelines for breeding tigers in captivity. This guidance provides Parties with species-specific information to augment the [IUCN SSC Guidelines on Ex Situ Management for Species Conservation](#). We urge the Standing Committee to maintain its request for the Secretariat to develop species-specific guidance for Parties in implementing Decision 14.69 and Res. Conf 12.5 (Rev. CoP19).

Item 44.1: [Jaguars \(Panthera onca\) Report of the Working Group](#)

Panthera thanks Brazil and the other members of the Intersessional Working Group on Jaguars for their work to produce the outcomes detailed in this report. Jaguars have lost roughly half of their historic range and face a variety of threats, including habitat loss and fragmentation, conflict with livestock and retaliatory killing, and an evolving trade in their body parts and derivatives. The jaguar range States, at their meeting in Cuiabá, Brazil in 2023, agreed upon a set of actions to address and monitor these threats through enhanced national and intergovernmental cooperation and stakeholder engagement, and identified 40 priority landscapes in which to focus these efforts in line with the objectives of the Jaguar 2030 Roadmap. We support the recommendations developed by the Working Group to prevent illegal killing of jaguars and their prey, to deter, detect and prosecute trafficking in their parts, and to promote education and behavior change for jaguars' long-term survival. We note the emphasis on the need for coordination and collaboration at all levels. Thus, Panthera also supports the conclusion of the Working Group that a specific draft resolution on jaguars incorporating these recommendations would help to galvanize Parties' efforts to implement them and strengthen cooperation among all key actors. We offer our support to assist in the drafting of the resolution should this recommendation go forward.



Item 44.2: Jaguars (*Panthera onca*) Report of the Secretariat [for this agenda item, this is a joint statement from Panthera, WCS and WWF]:

Panthera, WCS and WWF thank the Secretariat for its report. We welcome the Secretariat's acknowledgment of the range States' request for a single global initiative on jaguars with shared objectives and actions that can be taken within their respective mandates. We agree that this is the best way forward to avoid duplication of effort, ensure efficient use of resources, and promote coordination amongst all stakeholders to address a variety of threats to the species.

To streamline activities, maximize resources and impact, and reduce time to implementation, we propose the Standing Committee recommend that the Parties:

1. Consider a Joint CITES-CMS Jaguar Initiative as the intergovernmental platform for range-wide jaguar conservation and;
2. Further develop the draft programme of work delivered by the CMS Secretariat as the programme of work of the Joint CITES-CMS Jaguar Initiative to be implemented by the Parties to both conventions according to their respective mandates and;

With respect to next steps, Panthera, WCS and WWF urge the Standing Committee to request the CITES and CMS Secretariats work together to initiate an online review and consultation process on the draft programme of work found in Annex 3 of this document beginning as soon as possible following the present meeting.

We note that the [Jaguar 2030 Roadmap](#), developed in 2018 by jaguar range States and international organizations as a voluntary regional framework to secure the Jaguar Corridor, is a working model for national action and multilateral and intergovernmental cooperation endorsed by 16 current range States. The Roadmap is one of the inputs used to inform the draft programme of work prepared by the CMS Secretariat.

The continued development of the situational analysis—ideally to be maintained as a living document in such a dynamic space—can inform this process but need not precede it. A second range State meeting, if funding becomes available, and with planning assistance from the Jaguar 2030 Coordination Committee and others, could be convened prior to COP20 with a focus on implementation and financing of the joint initiative.

Panthera, WCS and WWF appreciate the expressed desire of past and present jaguar range States to move expeditiously and together to protect their emblematic species and all that jaguars contribute to biodiversity, people's health and livelihoods, and the cultural and spiritual integrity of the Americas. We encourage Parties to collaborate between now and June on a resolution that establishes a Joint CITES-CMS Jaguar Initiative and joint programme of work for adoption at COP20. We stand ready to work with range States to maintain their momentum and facilitate this effort.

APPENDIX I

Draft Guidance on Conservation Breeding of Captive Tigers

This guidance is intended to help Parties identify whether the breeding of captive tigers by a captive facility is contributing to the conservation of wild tigers. It has been prepared by WWF, Esther Conway (WildCats Conservation Alliance), Zoological Society of London, Four Paws International, Environmental Investigation Agency UK and Panthera.

Decision 14.69 states Parties with intensive operations breeding tigers on a commercial scale shall implement measures to restrict the captive population to a level supportive only to conserving wild tigers; tigers should not be bred for trade in their parts and derivatives. At SC77, Viet Nam expressed the need for detailed guidance to facilitate the implementation of Decision 14.69.

The Standing Committee requested the Secretariat, in consultation with the Animals Committee, to develop guidance to Parties on how to evaluate the conservation aspects of tiger captive breeding facilities, subject to external funding. At AC33, the Animals Committee agreed that the IUCN SSC Guidelines on the use of Ex Situ Management for Species Conservation [provide guidance to Parties on how to evaluate the conservation aspects of tiger captive breeding facilities](#), noting the mention of additional guidelines including the IUCN Guidelines for determining when and how ex situ management should be used in species conservation (2016) in the discussion in plenary. However, gaps were also noted by Parties and Observers in the available guidance, including on aspects such as the leakage of specimens into illegal markets and whether education and awareness alone were sufficient to constitute conservation, with the member from Asia remarking that the IUCN guidelines were general in nature, but that more specific guidelines may be desirable for tigers in light of reports of increased breeding of the species.

In light of these observations and building on remarks made by Observer organizations at AC33, we present the following definition and guidance on what constitutes conservation breeding for tigers. Captive breeding for conservation purposes is a complex issue, and therefore this guidance is specifically focused on tigers (*Panthera tigris*) and only intended to be applied for this species.

Conservation breeding of captive tigers can be defined as: Ex situ management of individuals that aims to minimize the degradation of behaviors, physical attributes and genetic diversity of the species (or subspecies) over at least 100 years, which benefits the conservation of in situ populations by preparing for the introduction of acclimated, viable individuals into the wild where they are extinct, at an unviable density, or require genetic rescue, and where the preferred option of wild to wild translocations is not viable. Breeding is managed and coordinated regionally (i.e. at the scale of more than one country, not an administrative regio or province within a single country) or globally, not at the facility level, through recognized associations.

Breeding is based on relatedness and aimed at minimizing the inevitable loss of genetic diversity or maximizing individual heterozygosity dependent upon the restoration requirements.

Ex situ is defined as per the IUCN Guidelines on the Use of Ex Situ Management for Species Conservation [i.e.](#), “ex situ” is defined as conditions under which individuals are spatially restricted with respect to their natural spatial patterns or those of their progeny, are removed from many of their natural ecological processes, and are managed on some level by humans.

To determine if existing facilities are engaged in conservation breeding of tigers the following checklist in the table below can be used (adapted from Sarah Christie, ZSL (2013) Preliminary Study of the Feasibility of a Tiger Restoration Programme in Cambodia’s Eastern Plains (Appendix II)).

Tigers in conservation breeding programs	
Desired product	Gene pool – long term maintenance of maximum possible wild gene diversity Note: populations of high allelic diversity and without adaptation to captive conditions would be preferable as it would contain more capability to adapt to wild conditions.
Aim	Maintain a behaviorally, physically and genetically healthy population over at least 100 years.
Coordination of breeding	Regionally (more than one country, not a region within a single country) or globally managed by zoo associations typically involving a number of cooperating zoos. Breeding recommendations based on genetic analysis, issued centrally and followed, after discussion, by all holders. Breeding outside recommendations actively avoided.
Genetic management strategy	Equalize and maximize the founder base. Avoid inbreeding.
Effect on wild gene pool	Maintained. Maximum possible wild gene diversity.
Approach to natural behaviors	Preserve natural behaviors. House only in facilities which preserve natural behaviors - avoid hand-rearing or unnatural social groups, for example, large single-sex adult groups as tigers are naturally territorial.
Demographic management strategy	Based on demographic analysis. Breed only as many animals as can be appropriately housed within the program for their lifetimes and as appropriate to the studbook requirements, i.e. conservation breeding is not about maximizing the number of the ex situ population and there is no need to have high numbers. Lengthen afterbirth interval (breed slowly) to minimize genetic drift.

Founder stock and breeding pool	Stock clearly tracing back to known wild caught founder stock and geographic origin (labeled using sub-specific designations) and therefore contain discrete sets of genetic adaptations to a particular habitat and climate type. Each regional population is managed to conserve a gene pool as broadly representative of the original wild population as possible.
Record keeping	All tigers can be traced through institutional records, with ancestry fully known and recorded.