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CITES CoP20 partially addresses amphibian trade with guidance documents and species listing

CITES regulates international trade in wildlife to ensure it is legal, tracible, sustainable and does not threaten the survival of species in the wild. However, more than one-third of amphibians are threatened by over-exploitation (Luedtke et al., 2023, *Nature*, 622, 308–314); 11 species are already extinct and 1,793 are categorized as threatened on the IUCN Red List. Internationally traded amphibian species principally originate from Asia, Africa and South America, with the largest volume traded for exotic gastronomy. Two amphibian-related items were discussed at the 20th Conference of the Parties (CoP20) to CITES in Samarkand, Uzbekistan.

Document 75, adopted on 4 December 2025, reported on online technical workshops convened by the CITES Secretariat in 2023, focusing on the conservation of amphibians involved in international trade. The draft decisions in the document called for continued data gathering on amphibian trade, including developing guidance for non-detriment findings. The discussion resulted in the adoption of draft decisions, with amendments to include evaluating whether current trade levels are compatible with species conservation.

Proposal 27, adopted by vote on 2 December 2025, was to include four species of water frogs of the genus *Pelophylax* (*P. epeiroticus*, *P. lessonae*, *P. ridibundus* and *P. shqipericus*) in Appendix II, with a delayed inclusion of 18 months (on 5 June 2027). Opponents to the proposal cited unstable taxonomy, a lack of species-specific trade data and issues of practical implementation. Proponents argued the listing was a necessary precautionary measure that would help to address over-exploitation for the frog leg market. International trade in these four species will be subject to regulation under Appendix II, requiring the issuance of export permits based on non-detriment findings.

Conservation interventions such as those from CITES are critical for achieving positive conservation momentum for amphibians. The inclusion of the four species in CITES

Appendix II aims to ensure all international trade in these species is legal, tracible and sustainable. However, the non-detriment finding process may prove challenging to complete. A potential outcome of this listing may be a shift in trade towards alternative species. Any such shift could also affect species threatened by international and unregulated trade and not currently listed on CITES Appendices.

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Integrated conservation of *Rhododendron liboense*, a Critically Endangered species in Guizhou Province, China

Rhododendron liboense, a distinctive species occurring in the Maolan National Nature Reserve, Libo County, Guizhou Province, China, belongs to the subgenus *Hymenanthes*. This evergreen tree, reaching 2–5 m in height, is highly ornamental, with pink, bell-shaped flowers c. 8 cm in diameter that bloom during April–May. The species was categorized as Critically Endangered on the Botanic Gardens Conservation International Red List of Rhododendrons (2011) and the Red List of China's Higher Plants (2013). A survey confirmed its extreme rarity, identifying only three wild populations with a total of 85 individuals (Huang et al., 2018, *Oryx*, 610–611).

Starting in 2022, supported by the Forestry Research Project in Guizhou Province (Qian Lin Ke He 2021-08) and Guizhou Provincial Key Technology R&D Programme (Qian Ke He Zhi Cheng [2023] YiBan 035), integrated conservation strategies for *R. liboense* were implemented, including in situ protection, ex situ relocation and reintroduction. In October 2025, the outcomes of these measures were assessed by evaluating in situ population size, the survival rate of ex situ seedlings and the performance of reintroduced plants. A 10 ha in situ conservation zone was established in 2022 to protect the Donghua population, demarcated with fencing and boundary markers. Recent monitoring indicates this population has increased by 15 individuals since 2018, raising the total number of



Rhododendron liboense in flower.

naturally distributed individuals to 101. From 2022 to 2024, three ex situ conservation sites were established at the Guizhou Botanical Garden, Guizhou State-owned Longli Forest Farm and Qiannan Botanical Garden, with 70 3-year-old seedlings planted at each site. The survival rate of these seedlings was 70–80%, resulting in a total of 162 surviving individuals across the three sites. Simultaneously, in March 2022–2024, three rounds of reintroduction were conducted within the Maolan Nature Reserve, with each round involving the planting of 180 seedlings into limestone microhabitats similar to the original habitat, using native soil as the substrate. The overall survival rate of reintroduced seedlings was 22%, contributing 121 new individuals to the wild and leading to the establishment of two new populations. Collectively, these actions have resulted in comprehensive protection efforts for this Critically Endangered species.

However, survival rates from initial reinforcement plantings were low. We found that most surviving seedlings were in karst stone troughs and crevices. This finding will be applied to select better future planting sites, aiming to improve survival, increase the number of wild individuals and expand the population.

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