

WORLD WILDLIFE DAY 2023:*Why This Day and The Underlying CITES Agreement are Significant*

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Paper - III
(Environment and Ecology)

March 3 is known as World Wildlife Day (WWD), marked annually to draw attention to issues of conservation of flora and fauna. The WWD site states, “This year, the theme is ‘Partnerships for Wildlife Conservation’. It will allow us to celebrate all conservation efforts, from intergovernmental to local scale.” It is further expanded into the conservation of marine life



and oceans, and on collaborating with businesses and funding conservation activities. “Successful partnerships for conservation must find ways of including business if we are to reverse the loss in biodiversity,” it adds.

Why is World Wildlife Day marked?

In 2013, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) proclaimed March 3 as the UN World Wildlife Day to celebrate and raise awareness of protecting the world’s wild animals and plants. This was as the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) was signed in 1973 on this day. March 3 marks the 50th Anniversary of CITES’ establishment. CITES is considered a landmark agreement on conservation that focuses on ensuring the sustainability of endangered species.

What is The CITES?

CITES is an international agreement between governments. Its aim is to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten the survival of the species. Its website states it was agreed upon with the recognition that "The trade in wild animals and plants crosses borders between countries, the effort to regulate it requires international cooperation to safeguard certain species from over-exploitation." It accords varying degrees of protection to more than 37,000 species of animals and plants, ranging from live animals and plants to wildlife products derived from them, including food products, exotic leather goods, medicines, etc.

Currently, there are 184 parties to the convention, including India. The CITES Secretariat is administered by UNEP (The United Nations Environment Programme) and is located in Geneva, Switzerland. The Conference of the Parties to CITES is the supreme consensus-based decision-making body of the Convention and comprises all its parties. In India, apart from the Union Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate.

Change, the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau is a statutory body under the Ministry that is especially meant to combat organised wildlife crime in the country. It assists and advises the customs authorities in the inspection of the consignments of flora and fauna as per the provisions of the Wild Life Protection Act of 1972, CITES and the export and import policy governing items.

How did World Wildlife Day begin?

On 20 December 2013, the United Nations General Assembly, in its 68th session, announced the celebration of World Wildlife Day every year on 3 March to raise awareness about the protection of wildlife and to raise awareness of endangered species of flora. The Wild Elephant Preservation Act was first passed in the year 1872 to prevent the extinction of wild animals.

Theme of World Wildlife Day 2023

World Wildlife Day is celebrated every year with a theme. The theme for World Wildlife Day 2023 is "Partnerships for Wildlife Conservation". The theme for World Wildlife Day in 2022 is "Reintroducing Key Species for Ecosystem Restoration".

Why is World Wildlife Day celebrated?

Apart from food and medicines, we get many other types of benefits from wildlife. One of these is that wildlife helps in maintaining a balanced climate. They help in regularizing monsoon and recovery of natural resources. World Wildlife Day or World Wild Life Day is celebrated every year by recognizing the contribution of animals and plants in the environment and understanding the importance of the existence of wildlife for life on earth.

Purpose of celebrating World Wildlife Day

The purpose of celebrating this day is very clear to work on ways to save the wildlife and flora which are disappearing all over the world due to whatever reason. Flora and fauna are very important for maintaining the biodiversity of the earth. But due to environmental imbalance and various types of experiments, the existence of some animals and plants is in danger.

How Does CITES Work?

The species covered under CITES are listed in three Appendices, according to the degree of protection they need.

- Appendix I includes species threatened with extinction. Trade in specimens of these species is permitted rarely, only in “exceptional circumstances”, such as gorillas, and lions from India.
- Appendix II includes species not necessarily threatened with extinction, but in which trade must be controlled to ensure their survival. For example, certain kinds of foxes and Hippopotamuses.
- Appendix III contains species that are protected in at least one country, which has asked other CITES Parties for assistance in controlling the trade, like the Bengal fox or the Golden Jackal from India. Different procedures are given category-wise to engage in the trade of species in each of the lists.

Why Is CITES Criticised?

One argument says having wildlife allowed to be traded further legitimises their movement and increases the possibility of their illegal trade. National Geographic referred to a 2019 analysis in the journal Science that found in nearly two-thirds of cases, CITES protections lag after a species is determined to be threatened by international trade. “For example, while pangolins were finally added to Appendix I in 2017, an estimated million were trafficked between 2000 and 2013”, it says.

Also, many animals that are in the wildlife trade are not protected by CITES. “If a party violates the convention, CITES can respond with sanctions, which prevent a country from trading in CITES-listed species. But countries are rarely sanctioned and the process can become highly politicized,” says the article. It points to the voluntary nature of CITES membership, so nobody is strictly bound to follow its direction.

However, issues of international conventions not going far enough to enforce their mandate are common in agreements of such a scale, given the number of parties involved. They rest on the implicit agreement that while the bodies generally do not have powers to penalise, there is at least a level of commitment that ensures some common ground as a first step.

CITES has also had some successes, helping in recovering the South American vicuña (a small member of the camel family) and the Nile crocodile. At the same time, its laxity has been questioned, on matters such as the ivory trade being allowed at times despite the convention banning it in 1989. Critics claimed there were sharp spikes in elephant poaching globally after one-off sales were allowed by the CITES in 1999 and 2008, of recovered ivory or from elephant deaths due to natural causes.

Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)

CITES, an international agreement between governments that currently has 184 members, aims to ensure that the existence of wild animal and plant species is not threatened by international trade. Its first conference was held in the year 1975, and India became the 25th participating country in the year 1976. Countries that have agreed to join CITES are known as Parties.

Although CITES is legally binding on the parties, in other words these parties are bound to implement the convention but it does not replace national laws.

Expected Question

Que. Consider the following statements-

1. CITES is an international agreement between governments that aims to ensure that the existence of wild animal and plant species is not threatened by international trade.
2. The Wildlife Crime Control Bureau in India is a statutory body brought in to combat organized wildlife crime in the country.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?—

- (a) Only 1
- (b) Only 2
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Answer : C

Mains Expected Question & Format

Que.: What is CITES and how does it protect wildlife? Critically examine its work for the protection of wildlife.

Answer Format :

- ❖ Write about CITES and how does it protect wildlife?
- ❖ Explain the work of CITES for the protection of wildlife with examples and the criticism being done on its work.
- ❖ Give a balanced conclusion.

Note: - The question of the main examination given for practice is designed keeping in mind the upcoming UPSC mains examination. Therefore, to get an answer to this question, you can take the help of this source as well as other sources related to this topic.