# CITES and the security of chelonia

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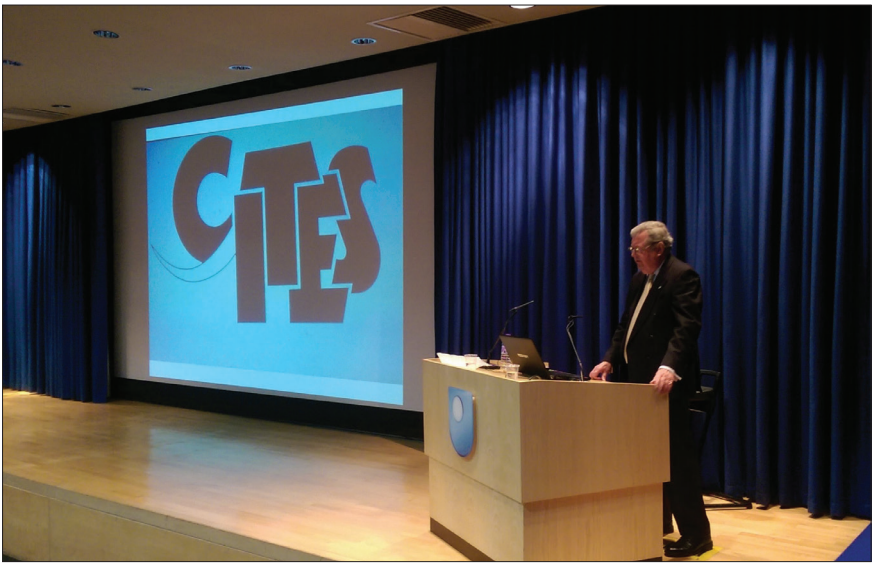


John Hayward addresses the 40th Anniversary Symposium of the BCG.

In the early part of the 1970s it became evident that many of our rare and endangered fauna and flora species were under attack by thieves stealing them from the wild to feed into an illegal international trade. In consequence of these concerns, some fifty plus countries throughout the world convened a conference in Washington D.C. to formulate a plan, to help deter and reduce this illicit activity. It decided that those animals in most need of protection, to prevent extinction in the wild, would be recorded on the list entitled 'Appendix 1'. Those deemed to be of a lesser status, but still requiring a close watch, were named on 'Appendix 2'. During the conference it was also decreed that each of the member countries would set up a licensing authority to monitor the trade in such animals and issue permits for commercial purposes. Trade in those highly endangered species is prohibited if they are taken from the wild. However, trade can be agreed if legally bred in captivity; then only under licence issued by the licensing authorities. In the UK, this is the responsibility of the Department of the Environment.

The inaugural meeting of the signatory parties, now known as the 'Washington Conference', gave birth to 'CITES', namely the 'Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora'. Representatives from member countries reconvene every two years to consider the status of all endangered and threatened species. The number of countries now involved is in excess of 170.

The next major development in species protection arose in 1996 when the European CITES Regulations came into force, imposing another layer of controls, with species listed being termed either 'Annex A' or 'Annex B'. Of significance to us was the further protection afforded to the Hermann's and spur-thighed tortoises, which, previously only a subject of 'Appendix 1' (International), were heightened to 'Annex A' (Europe). The implication of this inclusion is that those species can no longer be taken from their indigenous environments, but if captive bred can be traded with the appropriate Article 10 licence, issued by the licensing authority, the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) at Bristol. Such licences are granted with the proviso that the animal is microchipped when as a hatchling it attains a carapace length of 4 inches/10cms.

In the case of very young hatchlings, where the carapace is less than 10cms, the applicant is required to obtain a microchip and supply the unique ID number of that chip with the application. In the event of the young animal being traded, the chip will accompany the tortoise with the legal requirement to have it inserted when it attains the length of the said 10cms. This duty is placed on the purchaser of the animal who should comply with the legal requirements to do so.

The licence carries a fee of £25.00 per animal, to include the same single charge of £25.00 for all those bred collectively from the same clutch. All of this information is available on the CITES, Animal Health or Defra websites. In addition, we are always available to advise our members who have any queries regarding the trading of their chelonia.

The other main topic for discussion concerns the matter of animal security, especially tortoises, which have their own specific requirements to protect them from escape, straying and more importantly from being stolen. The significant risk with tortoises is their need to have daylight and be in the open air, which makes them an easy target of thieves, taking them from gardens and other open areas. It is impossible to supervise one's animals all the time, but we must be acutely aware that they are vulnerable when unattended.

Thieves fall into two main categories: first, the planned organised offender tracking down the location of the larger collections (to sell into the illegal market or for entry to a breeding programme) and therefore stolen to order. In recent months we have suffered from such thefts in

Cheshire where seven young spur-thighed tortoises were stolen, in Surrey with a significant theft of marginated tortoises and in Kent with a sulcata taken from a garden.

The second type of theft relates to the unplanned, casual or opportunist incident where cold callers or trespassers happen to see what is on offer, from equipment, tools, cycles etc., and they come across the tortoises, either in the open air or in sheds whilst in hibernation.

To help prevent these crimes, we all need to be cautious, vigilant and somewhat secretive as to the animals we keep. There are a number of security systems readily available from DIY stores which incorporate cameras, alarms and Passive Infrared Sensor (PIR) movement detectors to help in deterring the thief and protecting your animals. Such devices are often 'wireless' and easily installed.

Another major consideration is animal identification. Whenever there is a theft, the first questions from the police are 'what does it look like and how can it be identified?'

We have already discussed the matter of microchipping, which is ideal if the tortoise is large enough to be chipped. In some cases, owners see this as invasive and therefore other methods can be utilised. In these cases, images are vital, not only photographs of the plastron (which represents a unique fingerprint for each animal) but also of the animal in situ showing the various aspects of the carapace, its unique markings and dimensions. Each tortoise should be photographed annually (due to morphological changes as the animal grows), signed and dated and stored safely and securely to prove legal ownership, if ever it comes into the wrong hands and for evidential purposes if lost, stolen and recovered.

Finally we congratulate the BCG on its fortieth anniversary. It has been a pleasure to have been your security advisors for the past twenty years.