

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CITES CONVENTION IN THE UAE

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Introduction

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) Convention covers the international trade of species listed in the three CITES Appendices I, II & III which currently includes approximately 5,000 animal species and 28,000 plant species. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) joined the CITES Convention in 1990. There are two Management Authorities namely, 1) Federal Environment Agency for Abu Dhabi Emirate (www.feaapp.fea.gov.ae) and 2) Ministry of Environment & Water (MEW) for the Northern Emirates (www.uae.gov.ae/uaeagricent). As per CITES Conf 10.3 there is an independently designated Scientific Agency represented by the Environmental Agency-ABU DHABI (www.ead.ae).

CITES & National Legislation

There are presently 169 Parties (countries) which voluntarily implement the Convention and which does not take place of national laws – but regulates wildlife trade across international borders. To legally implement CITES at the national level the UAE has formulated Federal Law (11) of 2002 for “Regulating and Controlling the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora”. This law can be accessed from the Environment Agency ABU DHABI website at www.ead.ae. An Arabic translation of the species listed in the CITES Appendices was undertaken and this was officially gazetted so as to provide a list of species to which Federal law 11(2002) could be applied. Violations under this law are punishable by a fine and/or a prison term. The passing of this Federal Law has qualified the UAE for category 1 status in the CITES National legislation Project for implementing the CITES Convention at a Federal level in the UAE.

Raising CITES awareness

The CITES Management and Scientific Authorities have run several workshops within UAE to improve the capability of employees involved in monitoring and enforcing wildlife trade. These have been in the form of workshops and training courses targeting the staff of the CITES Management Authorities, customs, municipality staff. CITES awareness has also been raised through the production of a wildlife manual which lists common CITES and non-CITES species in trade within the UAE (Fig 1.) and this has been extensively distributed locally and within the GCC countries.

CITES Implementation & Enforcement

The major role of the Management Authorities are to issue CITES permits to applicants and to enforce national legislation to ensure that CITES listed species, products or derivatives are not being sold or possessed illegally without the appropriate CITES and other relevant documentation. Enforcement activities are undertaken through regular inspections of various commercial establishments such as pet shops for wildlife species, luxury good stores and gift shops for items such as ivory, animal furs and skins and supermarkets for items such as caviar. The various points of entry into the UAE – land, sea and air – are also manned by customs authorities and MEW staff to detect any illegal or suspicious shipments into the country. These enforcements actions have netted species and items such as falcons, tortoises, ivory products, furs of endangered species and caviar.

e-Government Initiative

To make the application of permits more user-friendly for the public the CITES Management and Scientific Authorities embarked on a system that first saw the development of a computer application which computerized the CITES permit application procedure which ensured all data was being stored in a database and was available electronically. This procedure linked the two Management Authorities, scientific Authorities and personnel at major points of entry in the UAE. The next step now is to develop the system in order to enable a more efficient use of the system and reduce the time wasted on physically applying for a permit by visiting the CITES Management Authority offices once all necessary documents have been uploaded and submitted with the on-line application.

Falcon Passports

The UAE has a strong cultural heritage linked to falconry and UAE falconers frequently travel within the region to practice falconry. To allow the frequent cross-border movements of falcons without the need for applying for CITES permits for each travel, the UAE introduced a Falcon Registration and Passport scheme (Fig 2.). The falcon passports allow the frequent movement of falcons and are issued to falconers with the appropriate documentation. The falcons are initially registered and then a 3-year valid passport is issued. There are some countries where falcon passports are not recognized, in such cases normal CITES permits are issued.

Animal Welfare Issues

The UAE is an official member of the World organization for Animal Health (OIE), and upon recommendations from the OIE, the Ministry of Environment & Water is in the process of drafting a national law on animal welfare and transportation. This law once drafted will cover the important issue of welfare of live animals, for both CITES and non-CITES listed species within the UAE.

Editors note:

A pdf of Federal Law (11) of 2002 for “Regulating and Controlling the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora” can be downloaded at www.wmenews.com/



Fig 1. Cover of a species identification guide for customs officials produced by the CITES authority. ©P. Soorae

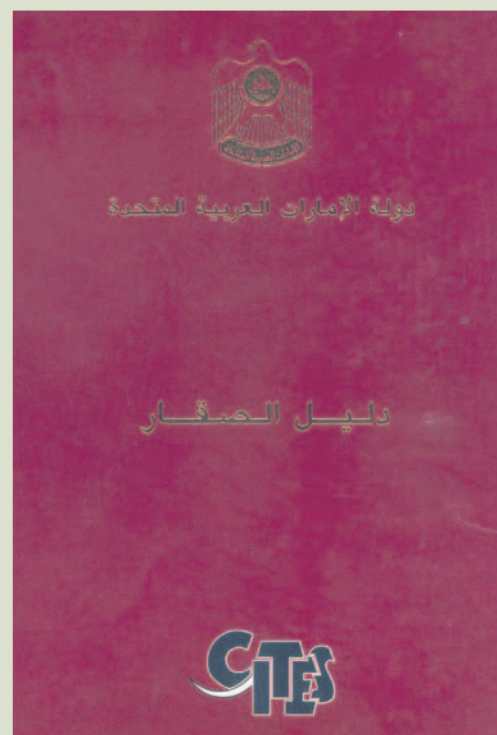


Fig 2. Falcon passport used in the UAE. ©P. Soorae