

Wildlife meeting backs more protection for giraffes

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The African giraffe population as a whole has shrunk by an estimated 40 percent over the past three decades, to just under 100,000 animals, according to the best figures available to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

Wildlife-supporting countries on Thursday backed regulating

international trade in giraffes in a bid to offer more protection to the gentle giants, feared to be facing a "silent extinction".

The vote in Geneva by parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) recognises for the first time that international trade is part of the threat facing giraffes.

The decision, which passed with 106 votes in favour to 21 votes opposed and seven abstaining, took place in committee and still needs a stamp of approval by the full CITES conference before it wraps up on August 28.

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And yet Thursday's vote, which implies listing all giraffes under CITES Appendix II and thus requiring tracking and regulation of all trade in the species, was highly controversial.

The proposal to list the giraffe came from a range of countries in western, central and eastern Africa, where giraffe populations have been particularly hard hit.

Chad's representative argued that "illegal cross-border trade (poses) a significant threat to the survival of giraffes."



Countries in western, central and eastern Africa have seen their giraffe populations particularly hard hit

But they met harsh resistance from southern African countries where the populations have traditionally been better protected and are healthier.

Countries, including South Africa, Botswana and Tanzania, maintained there was little evidence that international trade is contributing to the decline of the giraffe.

And they argued that imposing international regulations was unfair to countries that have strived to protect their giraffes.

"Such a decision fails to recognise our conservation achievements," the

Tanzanian representative said.

The vote implies that legal trade in giraffe parts, including those obtained by trophy hunters on Africa's legal game reserves, will be globally regulated.

Countries will be required to record the export of giraffe parts or artefacts, something only the United States currently does, and permits would be required for their trade.

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