



# Translocation of living organisms



IUCN POSITION STATEMENT

4 September 1987

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THE IUCN POSITION STATEMENT ON  
TRANSLOCATION OF LIVING  
ORGANISMS

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**INTRODUCTIONS, RE-INTRODUCTIONS AND  
RE-STOCKING**

*Prepared by the Species Survival Commission  
in collaboration with the Commission on Ecology, and the  
Commission on Environmental Policy, Law and Administration*

*As approved by the  
22nd Meeting of the IUCN Council,  
Gland, Switzerland*

*4 September 1987*

# IUCN Position Statement on Translocation of Living Organisms:

## INTRODUCTIONS, REINTRODUCTIONS AND RE-STOCKING

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## FOREWORD

This statement sets out IUCN's position on translocation of living organisms, covering introductions, re-introductions and re-stocking. The implications of these three sorts of translocation are very different so the paper is divided into four parts dealing with Introductions, Re-introductions, Re-stocking and Administrative Implications, respectively.

## DEFINITIONS:

**Translocation** is the movement of living organisms from one area with free release in another. The three main classes of translocation distinguished in this document are defined as follows:

- **Introduction** of an organism is the intentional or accidental dispersal by human agency of a living organism outside its historically known native range.
- **Re-introduction** of an organism is the intentional movement of an organism into a part of its native range from which it has disappeared or become extirpated in historic times as a result of human activities or natural catastrophe.
- **Re-stocking** is the movement of numbers of plants or animals of a species with the intention of building up the number of individuals of that species in an original habitat.

Translocations are powerful tools for the management of the natural and man made environment which, properly used, can bring great benefits to natural biological systems and to man, but like other powerful tools they have the potential to cause enormous damage if misused. This IUCN statement describes the advantageous uses of translocations and the work and precautions needed to avoid the disastrous consequences of poorly planned translocations.

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## PART I

# INTRODUCTIONS

## BACKGROUND

Non-native (exotic) species have been introduced into areas where they did not formerly exist for a variety of reasons, such as economic development, improvement of hunting and fishing, ornamentation, or maintenance of the cultures of migrated human communities. The damage done by harmful introductions to natural systems far outweighs the benefit derived from them. The introduction and establishment of alien species in areas where they did not formerly occur, as an accidental or intended result of human activities, has often been directly harmful to the native plants and animals of many parts of the world and to the welfare of mankind.

The establishment of introduced alien species has broken down the genetic isolation of communities of co-evolving species of plants and animals. Such isolation has been essential for the evolution and maintenance of the diversity of plants and animals composing the biological wealth of our planet. Disturbance of this isolation by alien species has interfered with the dynamics of natural systems causing the premature extinction of species. Especially successful and aggressive invasive species of plants and animals increasingly dominate large areas having

replaced diverse autochthonous communities. Islands, in the broad sense, including isolated biological systems such as lakes or isolated mountains, are especially vulnerable to introductions because their often simple ecosystems offer refuge for species that are not aggressive competitors. As a result of their isolation they are of special value because of high endemism (relatively large numbers of unique local forms) evolved under the particular conditions of these islands over a long period of time. These endemic species are often rare and highly specialised in their ecological requirements and may be remnants of extensive communities from bygone ages, as exemplified by the Pleistocene refugia of Africa and Amazonia.

The diversity of plants and animals in the natural world is becoming increasingly important to man as their demands on the natural world increase in both quantity and variety, notwithstanding their dependence on crops and domestic animals nurtured within an increasingly uniform artificial and consequently vulnerable agricultural environment.

Introductions, can be beneficial to man. Nevertheless the following sections define areas in which the introduction of alien organisms is not conducive to good management, and describe the sorts of decisions that should be made before introduction of an alien species is made.

To reduce the damaging impact of introductions on the balance of natural systems, governments should provide the legal authority and administrative support that will promote implementation of the following approach.

### **Intentional Introduction**

#### **General**

1. Introduction of an alien species should only be considered if clear and well defined benefits to man or natural communities can be foreseen.
2. Introduction of an alien species should only be considered if no native species is considered suitable for the purpose for which the introduction is being made.

#### **Introductions to Natural Habitats**

3. No alien species should be deliberately introduced into any natural habitat, island, lake, sea, ocean or centre of endemism, whether within or beyond the limits of national jurisdiction. A natural habitat is defined as a habitat not perceptibly altered by man. Where it would be effective, such areas should be surrounded by a buffer zone sufficiently large to prevent unaided spread of alien species from nearby areas. No alien introduction should be made within the buffer zone if it is likely to spread into neighbouring natural areas.

#### **Introduction into Semi-natural Habitat**

4. No alien species should be introduced into a semi-natural habitat unless there are exceptional reasons for doing so, and only when the operation has been comprehensively investigated and carefully planned in advance. A semi-natural habitat is one which has been detectably changed by man's actions or one which is managed by man, but still resembles a natural habitat in the diversity of its species and the complexity of their interrelationships. This excludes arable farm land, planted ley pasture and timber plantations.

#### **Introductions into Man-made Habitat**

5. An assessment should be made of the effects on surrounding natural and semi-natural habitats of the introduction of any species, sub-species, or variety of plant to artificial, arable, ley pasture or other predominantly monocultural forest systems. Appropriate action should be taken to minimise negative effects.

### **Planning a Beneficial introduction**

6. Essential features of investigation and planning consist of:
- an assessment phase culminating in a decision on the desirability of the introduction;
  - an experimental, controlled trial;
  - the extensive introduction phase with monitoring and follow-up.
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## **THE ASSESSMENT PHASE**

Investigation and planning should take the following factors into account:

a) No species should be considered for introduction to a new habitat until the factors which limit its distribution and abundance in its native range have been thoroughly studied and understood by competent ecologists and its probable dispersal pattern appraised.

Special attention should be paid to the following questions:

- What is the probability of the exotic species increasing in numbers so that it causes damage to the environment, especially to the biotic community into which it will be introduced?
- What is the probability that the exotic species will spread and invade habitats besides those into which the introduction is planned? Special attention should be paid to the exotic species' mode of dispersal.
- How will the introduction of the exotic proceed during all phases of the biological and climatic cycles of the area where the introduction is planned? It has been found that fire, drought and flood can greatly alter the rate of propagation and spread of plants.
- What is the capacity of the species to eradicate or reduce native species by interbreeding with them?
- Will an exotic plant interbreed with a native species to produce new species of aggressive polyploid invader? Polyploid plants often have the capacity to produce varied offspring some of which quickly adapt to and dominate, native floras and cultivars alike.
- Is the alien species the host to diseases or parasites communicable to other flora and fauna, man, their crops or domestic animals, in the area of introduction?
- What is the probability that the species to be introduced will threaten the continued existence or stability of populations of native species, whether as a predator, competitor for food, cover, breeding sites or in any other way? If the introduced species is a carnivore, parasite or specialised herbivore, it should not be introduced if its food includes rare native species that could be adversely affected.

b) There are special problems to be considered associated with the introduction of aquatic species. These species have a special potential for invasive spread.

- Many fish change trophic level or diet preference following introduction, making prediction of the results of the re-introduction difficult. Introduction of a fish or other species at one point on a river system or into the sea may lead to the spread of the species throughout the system or area with unpredictable consequences for native animals and plants. Flooding may transport introduced species from one river system to another.
- introduced fish and large aquatic invertebrates have shown a great capacity to disrupt natural systems as their larval, sub-adult and adult forms often use different parts of the same natural system.

c) No introduction should be made for which a control does not exist or is not possible. A risk-and-threat analysis should be undertaken including investigation of the availability of methods for the control of the introduction should it expand in a way not predicted or have unpredicted

undesirable effects, and the methods of control should be socially acceptable, efficient, should not damage vegetation and fauna, man, his domestic animals or cultivars.

d) When the questions above have been answered and the problems carefully considered, it should be decided if the species can reasonably be expected to survive in its new habitat, and if so, if it can reasonably be expected to enhance the flora and fauna of the area, or the economic or aesthetic value of the area, and whether these benefits outweigh the possible disadvantages revealed by the investigations.

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### **THE EXPERIMENTAL CONTROLLED TRIAL**

Following a decision to introduce a species, a controlled experimental introduction should be made observing the following advice:

- Test plants and animals should be from the same stock as those intended to be extensively introduced.
  - They should be free of diseases and parasites communicable to native species, man, his crops and domestic livestock.
  - The introduced species' performance on parameters in 'the Assessment Phase' above should be compared with the pre-trial assessment, and the suitability of the species for introduction should be reviewed in light of the comparison.
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### **THE EXTENSIVE INTRODUCTION**

If the introduced species behaves as predicted under the experimental conditions, then extensive introductions may commence but should be closely monitored. Arrangements should be made to apply counter measures to restrict, control, or eradicate the species if necessary.

The results of all phases of the introduction operation should be made public and available to scientists and others interested in the problems of introductions.

The persons or organisation introducing the species, not the public, should bear the cost of control of introduced organisms and appropriate legislation should reflect this.

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### **ACCIDENTAL INTRODUCTIONS**

1. Accidental introductions of species are difficult to predict and monitor, nevertheless they "should be discouraged where possible. The following actions are particularly important:
  - On island reserves, including isolated habitats such as lakes, mountain tops and isolated forests, and in wilderness areas, special care should be taken to avoid accidental introductions of seeds of alien plants on shoes and clothing and the introduction of animals especially associated with man, such as cats, dogs, rats and mice.
  - Measures, including legal measures, should be taken to discourage the escape of farmed, including captive-bred, alien wild animals and newly-domesticated species which could breed with their wild ancestors if they escaped.
  - In the interest of both agriculture and wildlife, measures should be taken to control contamination of imported agricultural seed with seeds of weeds and invasive plants.
  - Where large civil engineering projects are envisaged, such as canals, which

would link different biogeographical zones, the implications of the linkage for mixing the fauna and flora of the two regions should be carefully considered. An example of this is the mixing of species from the Pacific and Caribbean via the Panama Canal, and the mixing of Red Sea and Mediterranean aquatic organisms via the Suez Canal. Work needs to be done to consider what measures can be taken to restrict mixing of species from different zones through such large developments.

2. Where an accidentally introduced alien successfully and conspicuously propagates itself, the balance of its positive and negative economic and ecological effects should be investigated. If the overall effect is negative, measures should be taken to restrict its spread.

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### **WHERE ALIEN SPECIES ARE ALREADY PRESENT**

1. In general, introductions of no apparent benefit to man, but which are having a negative effect on the native flora and fauna into which they have been introduced, should be removed or eradicated. The present ubiquity of introduced species will put effective action against the majority of invasives beyond the means of many States but special efforts should be made to eradicate introductions on:
  - islands with a high percentage of endemics in the flora and fauna;
  - areas which are centres of endemism;
  - areas with a high degree of species diversity;
  - areas with a high degree of other ecological diversity;
  - areas in which a threatened endemic is jeopardised by the presence of the alien.
2. Special attention should be paid to feral animals. These can be some of the most aggressive and damaging alien species to the natural environment, but may have value as an economic or genetic resource in their own right, or be of scientific interest. Where a feral population is believed to have a value in its own right, but is associated with changes in the balance of native vegetation and fauna, the conservation of the native flora and fauna should always take precedence. Removal to captivity or domestication is a valid alternative for the conservation of valuable feral animals consistent with the phase of their evolution as domestic animals.

Special attention should be paid to the eradication of mammalian feral predators from areas where there are populations of breeding birds or other important populations of wild fauna. Predatory mammals are especially difficult, and sometimes impossible to eradicate, for example, feral cats, dogs, mink, and ferrets.

3. In general, because of the complexity and size of the problem, but especially where feral mammals or several plant invaders are involved, expert advice should be sought on eradication.

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### **BIOLOGICAL CONTROL**

1. Biological control of introductions has shown itself to be an effective way of controlling and eradicating introduced species of plants and more rarely, of animals. As biological control involves introduction of alien species, the same care and procedures should be used as with other intentional introductions.

## **MICRO-ORGANISMS**

1. There has recently been an increase of interest in the use of micro-organisms for a wide variety of purposes including those genetically altered by man.  
Where such uses involve the movement of micro-organisms to areas where they did not formerly exist, the same care and procedures should be used as set out above for other species.

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## **PART II**

### **THE RE-INTRODUCTION OF SPECIES \***

Re-introduction is the release of a species of animal or plant into an area in which it was indigenous before extermination by human activities or natural catastrophe. Re-introduction is a particularly useful tool for restoring a species to an original habitat where it has become extinct due to human persecution, over-collecting, over-harvesting or habitat deterioration, but where these factors can now be controlled. Re-introductions should only take place where the original causes of extinction have been removed. Re-introductions should only take place where the habitat requirements of the species are satisfied. There should be no re-introduction if a species became extinct because of habitat change which remains unremedied, or where significant habitat deterioration has occurred since the extinction.

The species should only be re-introduced if measures have been taken to reconstitute the habitat to a state suitable for the species.

The basic programme for re-introduction should consist of:

- a feasibility study;
- a preparation phase;
- release or introduction phase; and a
- follow-up phase.

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### **THE FEASIBILITY STUDY**

An ecological study should assess the previous relationship of the species to the habitat into which the re-introduction is to take place, and the extent that the habitat has changed since the local extinction of the species. If individuals to be re-introduced have been captive-bred or cultivated, changes in the species should also be taken into account and allowances made for new features liable to affect the ability of the animal or plant to re-adapt to its traditional habitat.

The attitudes of local people must be taken into account especially if the reintroduction of a species that was persecuted, over-hunted or over collected, is proposed. If the attitude of local people is unfavorable an education and interpretive programme emphasizing the benefits to them of the re-introduction, or other inducement, should be used to improve their attitude before re-introduction takes place.

The animals or plants involved in the re-introduction must be of the closest available race or type to the original stock and preferably be the same race as that previously occurring in the area.

Before commencing a re-introduction project, sufficient funds must be available to ensure that the project can be completed, including the follow-up phase.

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## **THE PREPARATION AND RELEASE OR INTRODUCTORY PHASES**

The successful re-introduction of an animal or plant requires that the biological needs of the species be fulfilled in the area where the release is planned. This requires a detailed knowledge of both the needs of the animal or plant and the ecological dynamics of the area of re-introduction. For this reason the best available scientific advice should be taken at all stages of a species re-introduction.

This need for clear analysis of a number of factors can be clearly seen with reference to introductions of ungulates such as ibex, antelope and deer where re-introduction involves understanding and applying the significance of factors such as the ideal age for re-introducing individuals, ideal sex ratio, season, specifying capture techniques and mode of transport to re-introduction site, freedom of both the species and the area of introduction from disease and parasites, acclimatisation, helping animals to learn to forage in the wild, adjustment of the gut flora to deal with new forage, 'imprinting' on the home range, prevention of wandering of individuals from the site of re-introduction, and on-site breeding in enclosures before release to expand the released population and acclimatise the animals to the site. The re-introduction of other taxa of plants and animals can be expected to be similarly complex.

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### **FOLLOW-UP PHASE**

Monitoring of released animals must be an integral part of any re-introduction programme. Where possible there should be long-term research to determine the rate of adaptation and dispersal, the need for further releases and identification of the reasons for success or failure of the programme.

The species impact on the habitat should be monitored and any action needed to improve conditions identified and taken.

Efforts should be made to make available information on both successful and unsuccessful re-introduction programmed through publications, seminars and other communications.

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## **PART III**

### **RESTOCKING**

1. Restocking is the release of a plant or animal species into an area in which it is already present. Restocking may be a useful tool where:
  - it is feared that a small reduced population is becoming dangerously inbred; or
  - where a population has dropped below critical levels and recovery by natural growth will be dangerously slow; or
  - where artificial exchange and artificially-high rates of immigration are required to maintain outbreeding between small isolated populations on biogeographical islands.
2. In such cases care should be taken to ensure that the apparent nonviability of the population, results from the genetic institution of the population and not from poor species management which has allowed deterioration in the habitat or over-utilisation of the population. With good management of a population the need for re-stocking should be avoidable but where re-stocking is contemplated the following points should be observed:

- a) Restocking with the aim of conserving a dangerously reduced population should only be attempted when the causes of the reduction have been largely removed and natural increase can be excluded.
- b) Before deciding if restocking is necessary, the capacity of the area it is proposed to restock should be investigated to assess if the level of the population desired is sustainable. If it is, then further work should be undertaken to discover the reasons for the existing low population levels. Action should then be taken to help the resident population expand to the desired level. Only if this fails should restocking be used.
3. Where there are compelling reasons for restocking the following points should be observed.
- a) Attention should be paid to the genetic constitution of stocks used for restocking.
- In general, genetic manipulation of wild stocks should be kept to a minimum as it may adversely affect the ability of a species or population to survive. Such manipulations modify the effects of natural selection and ultimately the nature of the species and its ability to survive.
  - Genetically impoverished or cloned stocks should not be used to re-stock populations as their ability to survive would be limited by their genetic homogeneity.
- b) The animals or plants being used for re-stocking must be of the same race as those in the population into which they are released.
- c) Where a species has an extensive natural range and restocking has the aim of conserving a dangerously reduced population at the climatic or ecological edge of its range, care should be taken that only individuals from a similar climatic or ecological zone are used since interbreeding with individuals from an area with a milder climate may interfere with resistant and hardy genotypes on the population's edge.
- d) Introduction of stock from zoos may be appropriate, but the breeding history and origin of the animals should be known and follow as closely as possible Assessment Phase guidelines a, b, c and d (see pages 5-7). In addition the dangers of introducing new diseases into wild populations must be avoided: this is particularly important with primates that may carry human zoonoses.
- e) Restocking as part of a sustainable use of a resource (e.g. release of a proportion of crocodiles hatched from eggs taken from farms) should follow guidelines a and b (above).
- f) Where restocking is contemplated as a humanitarian effort to release or rehabilitate captive animals it is safer to make such releases as re-introductions where there is no danger of infecting wild populations of the same species with new diseases and where there are no problems of animals having to be socially accepted by wild individuals of the species.
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## NATIONAL, INTERNATIONAL AND SCIENTIFIC IMPLICATIONS OF TRANSLOCATIONS

### NATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

1. Pre-existing governmental administrative structures and frameworks already in use to protect agriculture, primary industries, wilderness and national parks should be used by governments to control both intentional and unintentional importation of organisms, especially through use of plant and animal quarantine regulations.
2. Governments should set up or utilise pre-existing scientific management authorities or experts in the fields of biology, ecology and natural resource management to advise them on policy matters concerning translocations and on individual cases where an introduction, re-introduction or restocking or farming of wild species is proposed.
3. Governments should formulate national policies on:
  - translocation of wild species;
  - capture and transport of wild animals;
  - artificial propagation of threatened species;
  - selection and propagation of wild species for domestication; and
  - prevention and control of invasive alien species.
4. At the national level legislation is required to curtail introductions:

**Deliberate introductions** should be subject to a permit system. The system should apply not only to species introduced from abroad but also to native species introduced to a new area in the same country. It should also apply to restocking.

#### **Accidental introductions**

- for all potentially harmful organisms there should be a prohibition to import them and to trade in them except under a permit and under very stringent conditions. This should apply in particular to the pet trade;
- where a potentially harmful organism is captive bred for commercial purposes (e.g. mink) there should be established by legislation strict standards for the design and operation of the captive breeding facilities. In particular, procedures should be established for the disposal of the stock of animals in the event of a discontinuation of the captive breeding operation;
- there should be strict controls on the use of live fish bait to avoid inadvertent introductions of species into water where they do not naturally occur.

#### **Penalties**

5. Deliberate introductions without a permit as well as negligence resulting in the escape or introduction of species harmful to the environment should be considered criminal offences and punished accordingly. The author of a deliberate introduction without a permit or the person responsible for an introduction by negligence should be legally liable for the damage incurred and should in particular bear the costs of eradication measures and of habitat restoration where required.

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## INTERNATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

### **Movement of Introduced Species Across International Boundaries**

1. Special care should be taken to prevent introduced species from crossing the borders of a neighboring state. When such an occurrence is probable, the neighboring state should be promptly warned and consultations should be held in order to take adequate measures.

#### **The Stockholm Declaration**

2. According to Principle 21 of the Stockholm Declaration on the Human Environment, states have the responsibility 'to ensure that activities within their jurisdiction or control do not cause damage to the environment of other states'.

#### **International Codes of Practice, Treaties and Agreements**

3. States should be aware of the following international agreements and documents relevant to translocation of species:
  - ICES, Revised Code of Practice to Reduce the Risks from introduction of Marine Species, 1982.
  - FAO, Report of the Expert Consultation on the Genetic Resources of Fish, Recommendations to Governments No L 1980.
  - EIFAC (European Inland Fisheries Advisory Commission), Report of the Working Party on Stock Enhancement, Hamburg, FRG 1983.
  - The Bonn Convention MSC: Guidelines for Agreements under the Convention.
  - The Berne Convention: the Convention on the Conservation of European wildlife and Natural Habitats.
  - The ASEAN Agreement on the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources.
  - Law of the Sea Convention, article 196.
  - Protocol on Protected Areas and Wild Fauna and Flora in Eastern African Region.

In addition to the international agreements and documents cited, States also should be aware of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). International shipments of endangered or threatened species listed in the Appendices to the Convention are subject to CITES regulation and permit requirements. Enquiries should be addressed to: CITES Secretariat \*\*, Chèmin des Anèmones, 1219 Chatelaine, Geneva, Switzerland; telephone: 41/22/979 9139 or 9140, fax: 41/22/797 3417, e-mail: [cites@unep.ch](mailto:cites@unep.ch).

#### **Regional Development Plans**

4. International, regional or country development and conservation organisations, when considering international, regional or country conservation strategies or plans, should include in-depth studies of the impact and influence of introduced alien species and recommend appropriate action to ameliorate or bring to an end their negative effects.

#### **Scientific Work Needed**

5. A synthesis of current knowledge on introductions, re-introductions and re-stocking is needed.
6. Research is needed on effective, target specific, humane and socially acceptable methods of eradication and control of invasive alien species.

7. The implementation of effective action on introductions, re-introductions and re-stocking frequently requires judgements on the genetic similarity of different stocks of a species of plant or animal. More research is needed on ways of defining and classifying genetic types.
8. Research is needed on the way in which plants and animals are dispersed through the agency of man (dispersal vector analysis).

A review is needed of the scope, content and effectiveness of existing legislation relating to introductions.

### **IUCN Responsibilities**

International organisations, such as UNEP, UNESCO and FAO, as well as states planning to introduce, re-introduce or restock taxa in their territories, should provide sufficient funds, so that IUCN as an international independent body, can do the work set out below and accept the accompanying responsibilities.

9. IUCN will encourage collection of information on all aspects of introductions, re-introductions and restocking, but especially on the case histories of re-introductions; on habitats especially vulnerable to invasion; and notable aggressive invasive species of plants and animals.

Such information would include information in the following categories:

- a bibliography of the invasive species;
  - the taxonomy of the species;
  - the synecology of the species; and
  - methods of control of the species.
10. The work of the Threatened Plants Unit of IUCN defining areas of high plant endemism, diversity and ecological diversity should be encouraged so that guidance on implementing recommendations in this document may be available.
  11. A list of expert advisors on control and eradication of alien species should be available through IUCN.

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#### **Note:**

\* The section on re-introduction of species has been enhanced by the Guidelines for Re-introductions

\*\* The address of the CITES Secretariat has been updated.

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