



## Voluntary Disclosure Scheme To Owners of Exotic Live Species

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**Context:** The Government has rolled out a voluntary disclosure scheme which will allow the owners of exotic live species to declare it to the government.



**Background:** The Supreme

Court, on 22<sup>nd</sup> November, supported the Allahabad High Court judgment that allow immunity from investigation and prosecution if one declared illegal acquisition or possession of exotic wildlife species between June and December.

This was under a new amnesty scheme announced by the Centre. The High Court held that whoever declares the stock of exotic species and submits to registration under the amnesty scheme, shall have immunity from any inquiry into the source of licit acquisition or possession of the voluntarily declared stock of exotic species.

### Scheme

Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has come out with an advisory on a one-time voluntary disclosure scheme that allows owners of exotic live species that have been acquired illegally, or without documents, to declare their stock to the government between June and December 2020.

With this scheme, the government aims to address the challenge of zoonotic diseases, develop an inventory of exotic live species for better compliance under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), and regulate their import.

CITES is an international agreement between governments that ensures international trade does not endanger wild animals, birds and plants. The Appendices I, II and III of CITES have listed as many as 5,950 species that need protection against over-exploitation via international trade.

These species include animals like lemurs, iguanas, albino monkeys, civets, tortoises, coral snakes. These species are also popularly kept as exotic pets in India.

### **Procedure & Objective**

Under the scheme a procedure has outlined, that includes the disclosure, which can be performed online through MoEFCC's Parivesh portal. The owner of the animal ( In illegal possession ) will have to declare the stock as on January 1, 2020 to the Chief Wildlife Warden (CWLW) of the concerned state or Union Territory.

This will be followed by a physical verification of the animals. The CWLW will have to issue an online certificate of possession of exotic live species within six months of the date of the voluntary disclosure. After the registration, it is mandatory for the owner to allow the CWLW with free access to the exotic species declared on any day for verification.

Apart from this, the CWLW has to be informed about any new acquisition, death or change in possession of the animals within 30 days. The scheme has also specified guidelines for surrender of such animals to a recognised zoo. The owner will also have to provide the details of the species acquired, their numbers, and the address of the facility where they are housed.

### **Significance of the Move**

The Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI), which enforces anti-smuggling laws, says India has emerged as a big demand centre for exotic birds and animals with an increase in smuggling of endangered species from different parts of the world. Most of this exotic wildlife is imported through Illegal channels and then sold in the domestic market as pets.

The DRI further added in its 2019-2020 annual report that the long international border and air routes are used to source consignments from Bangkok, Malaysia and other top tourist destinations in South East Asia, as well as from Europe from

where they are sent to Kolkata, Chennai, Hyderabad, Delhi, Bangalore, Mumbai, Cochin.

In the last one year, the DRI has seized black-and-white ruffed lemur endemic to Madagascar, the endangered hoolock gibbon and palm civet, albino monkeys, crocodiles, pygmy falcons, kookaburras, scarlet macaws, aracaris among several others.

## **Conclusion**

In a report the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) said that India has seen a rise in demand for exotic birds and animals and noted an increase in smuggling of endangered species. According to DRI, smuggling in India is from different parts of the world as many exotic wildlife species are being imported via Illegal channels and later sold in the domestic market as pets. Hence the move will certainly minimized the illegal trading and possession of near threatened and endangered species.

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## **Connecting the Article**

**Question for Prelims :** With reference to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES ) agreement, consider the following statements:

1. Commercial Trading of the animals under Appendix-I is allowed.
2. Asiatic lions and Sea turtles fall in Appendix-II.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct ?

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

**Question for Mains :** How successful is the Washington convention in curbing the illicit trade of endangered species? What steps did India take to stop the illegal trade of wild animals? Discuss

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