

Know Your Bow: Tips for Owners and Users of Pernambuco Bows

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How well do you know your Pernambuco bow? Pernambuco wood is used in most advanced student and professional bows. The Pernambuco (*Paubrasilia echinata*) tree is native to the Atlantic forests in Brazil and its populations are threatened. Bow owners and users can take voluntary actions to: (1) support sustainable plantations of Pernambuco and conservation efforts, (2) document basic facts about the wood used in their bows, and (3) be informed consumers. **Voluntary steps today can help to avert the possible need for trade restrictions later.**

Do I need special permits to buy, sell, or travel with my finished Pernambuco bow internationally? In most cases, special permits are not required. On February 23, 2023, new rules went into effect, requiring CITES permits for all Pernambuco wood the first time it is exported from Brazil – including, for the first time, finished bows exiting Brazil. **The vast majority of Pernambuco bows made over the past two hundred years were already located outside of Brazil before the newest rules came into effect, and are not subject to these new permit requirements.** However, all bow owners and consumers should better understand the history of the bows they own, gather basic facts and documentation, and learn how to take action to help sustain the Pernambuco trees in their native habitat for future generations.

What is CITES? The [Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora \(CITES\)](#) is a treaty that regulates international trade in animal and plant species. It provides a framework for cooperation and collaboration among its member Parties (most countries globally) to ensure that international trade in specimens of animal and plant species is legal and does not threaten their survival in the wild. Species are listed in three [CITES Appendices](#), each providing a different level of controls over trade. As a musician, orchestra, or music ensemble, you might be aware that material used in musical instruments such as ivory, lizard skin, and Brazilian rosewood is already under CITES controls.

CITES Parties meet every two to three years at the Conference of Parties (CoP) to re-evaluate controls species-by-species. Groups representing music stakeholders participate in these policy discussions and the latest one took place in November 2022 in Panama (CoP19).

How does CITES protect Pernambuco? Since September 13, 2007, the Pernambuco wood used in bows has been included under CITES Appendix II, with rules that require any wood material exported from Brazil (up to the unfinished “bow blank” stage) to be legally and sustainably harvested and accompanied by CITES permits when traded internationally. However, until February 23, 2023, finished bows were not subject to CITES requirements or controls and could travel without CITES permits.

As of February 23, 2023, CITES permits are required for *all* Pernambuco wood the first time it leaves Brazil – including finished bows as they leave Brazil. CITES Parties adopted these measures at CoP19 in an effort to halt trafficking of Pernambuco wood and bows and to protect wild populations of Pernambuco.

If I don't need CITES permits to buy, sell, or travel with my Pernambuco bow outside of Brazil, why do I need to learn more about how it was made? Now that CITES is regulating bows as finished products in

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this new way for exports from Brazil, it is wise to proactively have a record to make clear for future resale that your bow is CITES compliant with the latest rules, meaning it was located outside of Brazil before February 23, 2023, made outside of Brazil before February 23, 2023, or was exported as a finished bow from Brazil with a CITES permit after that date. Documentation is also a helpful way to establish that certain bows are exempt from permit rules.

How do I know if my bow is made with Pernambuco? Seek out a bowmaker or luthier to evaluate the material and confirm the wood in the bow. You can ask for a written declaration from a bowmaker or expert evaluator describing the material in the bow. Many older bows do not have identifying marks from their maker. Make the best effort to collect the following:

- Dated third-party instrument evaluation, noting maker, approximate year made, and material
- Take identifying photographs, including any markings or distinguishing characteristics of the bow

How can I demonstrate that my finished bow was already outside of Brazil before February 23, 2023, and has not required a CITES permit as a finished product? Make a best effort to document your bow's birthdate, purchase date, and location. The new CITES permit export requirement only applies to finished bows (as well as finished musical instruments, finished musical instrument accessories, and finished musical instrument parts) exported the *first* time from Brazil on or after February 23, 2023. The following documentation can help establish legality of existing bows:

- Dated receipts of sale
- Dated insurance policy
- A signed affidavit attesting to the date (or approximate date) the bow came into your ownership outside of Brazil
- A signed statement from the maker, verifying the bow was legally crafted

If your bow was made and sold after Feb. 23, 2023, you probably have one or more of these documents already. If you don't, you should contact the maker or seller and ask for them. Most bow-makers are now well-informed about the new legal environment and are aware that customers are seeking documentation.

Gathering this evidence can help to establish that the bow was already a finished product located outside of Brazil when the new CITES regulations came into force, and, therefore, was not illegally exported from Brazil without a CITES permit or any other document required under Brazilian law.

What should I keep in mind when traveling with my bow? Remember: as long as you are outside of Brazil, a CITES permit is not required when traveling with a finished bow unless it contains other material covered under CITES controls, such as sea turtle or elephant ivory. If you plan to travel to Brazil with your Pernambuco bow, it will be critically important to gather evidence (see section above) that your bow was already outside of Brazil prior to February 23, 2023. In the absence of such evidence, you may be faced with serious complications on your departure from Brazil.

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How can I determine whether the Pernambuco wood used to make my bow was harvested and traded in compliance with CITES? Bows made and located outside of Brazil prior to September 13, 2007 (when Pernambuco was first included under CITES Appendix II) are considered “pre-Convention” under CITES, which means that no historic CITES paperwork (e.g., permits) connected with the wood used to make the bow was required. For bows made after Sept. 13, 2007 outside of Brazil, confirmation that the wood was exported from Brazil prior to Sept. 13, 2007 or was traded internationally with a CITES permit or pre-Convention certificate can help establish its legal origin.

How can I be an informed consumer and re-seller? Bows exported from Brazil on or after February 23, 2023 *must be* accompanied by a valid CITES export permit issued in Brazil (the same is true for bows that have been in transit from Brazil and reached their country of destination on or after February 23, 2023). It is very important to ascertain the legality of the bow(s) coming into your possession after February 23, 2023 by requesting proof that a CITES permit was not required, or a copy of the valid CITES export permit. In case you decide to re-sell your bow in the future, your buyer will probably ask you to provide the documents outlined above as evidence of its legal origin. Stay tuned as we learn more about the permit process that Brazilian CITES authorities will adopt for finished bows exported on or after February 23, 2023.

For further information, contact your [national CITES authority](#).

How can I take action to support conservation? We all have a vitally important role to play in ensuring the conservation of the Pernambuco species in Brazil and the future health of the threatened forest ecosystem in which it grows. Learn more about how you can [support the International Pernambuco Conservation Initiative](#) and its work to sustain the species and find more information here: [IPCI Germany](#), [IPCI Canada](#), [IPCI USA](#), [International Alliance of Violin and Bow Makers for Protected Species](#), [Information in French](#).

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