

### Expedition Dates

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22 August – 9 September 2005

### Area Description

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Based on the area's high vascular plant diversity, impressive mammalian diversity and high levels of endemism among avian species, the Mountains of Southwest China are recognized as one of 34 global Hotspots of Biodiversity (Mittermeier et al. 2004). This Biodiversity Hotspot, comprising nearly one-tenth of China's land area (about 800,000 km<sup>2</sup>), contains the eastern Tibet Autonomous Region, northwestern Yunnan, western Sichuan, the southeastern tip of Qinghai and the southern tip of Gansu, and harbors the richest biodiversity of any temperate forest region in the world (Boufford et al. 2004).

The region is also culturally rich. Nearly 80 percent of the hotspot is inhabited by Tibetans, who are strong believers in Tibetan Buddhism, which teaches unique cultural values and perceptions toward life and the natural world. In Ganzi Prefecture of Sichuan and eastern Tibet, those places where wildlife still can be found are most often the protected sacred sites of local villages and monasteries. The practice of protecting sacred sites has resulted in an accumulated wealth of indigenous knowledge on land-use and resource management and is still functional in many places despite the influences from outside the region. This non-material value system presents a unique opportunity for biodiversity conservation in the Hotspot and is especially important in promoting sustainable development and livelihoods, not only for Tibetan communities but also for the rest of Chinese society.

### Expedition Objectives

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The goal of Conservation International's (CI) Sacred Lands Project is to conserve the unique biodiversity of the Mountains of Southwest China Hotspot by promoting traditional Tibetan sacred lands and resource management systems in the region, and promoting the associated sustainable lifestyle values to the broader Chinese society.

A Rapid Assessment Program (RAP) team of Chinese and international biodiversity experts surveyed three remote valleys in the Mountains of Southwest China Hotspot, Sichuan Province, China. The RAP survey data will inform CI and local Tibetan communities of the rich biodiversity on their lands and help them promote protection of their lands beyond their communities. Data will also be used to justify and determine boundaries for the expansion of nature reserves and parks in the region.

### Results

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All three RAP survey sites contain a rich and interesting biodiversity (see Executive Summary). In particular, at Site 1, Danba County, the RAP team documented many globally threatened species, including Critically Endangered (CR) and Endangered (EN) small mammal species. Site 2, Kangding, contained the highest diversity since it was at the lowest elevation, with several species possibly new to science, including two amphibian species. The third site, Yajiang, was at the highest elevation and in best condition, with a high diversity of mammals and birds, and high habitat heterogeneity.