

# Executive Summary

## INTRODUCTION

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Suriname is one of the last places on Earth where an opportunity still exists to conserve huge tracts of pristine diverse tropical forests. Suriname is less than 6% deforested, exhibits the lowest population density of any moist tropical region on Earth (0.2 people/ha), has few roads in the forested part of the country (which can be accessed only by small boat, small plane, or on foot), and virtually all of the lands are public and under the control of national government or indigenous and Maroon communities.

However, the isolation that has protected Suriname's ecosystems, natural resources, and indigenous cultures is disappearing at an increasing rate, and the opportunity to act to preserve these remarkable resources will soon be gone. Record high commodity prices have encouraged the spread of illegal gold miners from Brazil across the region, spurred potential major hydropower and mining investments, and provided the incentive to press ahead with road and dam projects.

Southeastern Suriname is possibly the most remote and pristine region of Suriname. The region extends from the Sipaliwini Nature Reserve in the west, across the mountain ranges of the Grensgebergte, Toemoekhoemak gebergte, and Orangebergte, to the border with French Guiana. It is bordered to the north by the Tapanahony River, which becomes part of the Marowijne River watershed. Southern Suriname has a rich biodiversity, making it a high priority region for protection. This region was highlighted in the Guiana Shield Priority Setting Workshop held by CI, IUCN and UNDP in April 2002 (Huber and Foster 2003) as one of the highest ranked areas for biodiversity conservation. One of the first steps in the process of protecting Southern Suriname is to collect baseline biological and socio-economic data for the region, particularly in areas where no scientific data exist.

Conservation International-Suriname and CI's RAP program began this process by collecting biodiversity data in August 2010 in Southwestern Suriname near the Amerindian village of Kwamalasamutu (see results in O'Shea et al. 2011). The 2012 RAP survey of Southeastern Suriname was the next step in establishing a baseline of data for Southern

Suriname. Together, these RAP surveys provide data to guide conservation and development activities in Southern Suriname and to provide scientific justification for protection of this diverse and important ecosystem.

### **The Grensgebergte and Kasikasima Mountains and Palumeu River**

The RAP survey provided scientists with the rare opportunity to explore a totally unstudied and unique mountain range, as well as the Upper Palumeu River. To our knowledge, the mountains of the Grensgebergte (Border Mountains) and Upper Palumeu River have never been studied or even explored by scientists. The local Amerindians occasionally travel up the Palumeu River and walk over the border to Brazil but few ever enter the Grensgebergte Mountains. The elevation and forest types within the Southeastern Suriname mountains range from lowland floodplain forest to isolated mountain peaks at over 780 m elevation. The Palumeu River flows in a wide floodplain within the Grensgebergte but the river is shallow and difficult to navigate by boat. Thus the only way to enter the mountains is to cut a new trail and enter on foot, or to enter by air. The first step for this RAP survey was to identify rocky outcrops in the mountains from satellite imagery where a helicopter could possibly land. The Kasikasima Mountain is a unique granitic mountain formation that rises over 700 m above the rainforest. It has over twelve peaks of steep granite outcroppings. While the METS tourism company takes adventurous tourists to the rock, there have not been many studies of the biodiversity of the area. The mountain has a trail that allows access up to about 500 m within the forested side of the mountain.

### **The RAP Team**

The RAP scientific team of 16 people included scientists from the Anton de Kom University of Suriname, CELOS, Conservation International, Global Wildlife Conservation, the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard University, the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences, the Biodiversity Institute at the University of Kansas, the Royal Ontario Museum, and the National Herbarium of the Netherlands—Naturalis Biodiversity Centre. The RAP team