

A RAPID BIODIVERSITY ASSESSMENT OF THE KAIJENDE HIGHLANDS, ENGA PROVINCE, PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Expedition Dates

August 19–September 9, 2005

Description of Expedition

This 22-day RAP Expedition surveyed several sites in the Kaijende Highlands, a vast near-uninhabited expanse of montane habitat near Porgera in Enga Province, Papua New Guinea (PNG). The RAP survey sites were located in lower montane rainforest (Lake Tawa), in upper montane rainforest (Paiela Road) and in subalpine grassland and stunted upper montane rainforest mosaics (Omyaka and Waile Creek) in Papua New Guinea's central cordillera. The first RAP survey site at Omyaka was located at the boundary between subalpine grassland dotted with *Cyathea* tree-ferns, and stunted montane rainforest at an elevation of 3,200 m. The second survey site was located in lower montane rainforest at Lake Tawa at an elevation of 2,100–2,400 m. This site was in a remarkable closed valley at the edge of a series of interconnected lakes that drained from the valley through one or more sink-holes. The third RAP survey site was centred on the Porgera mine and involved short forays to a series of 'sub-sites' including disturbed habitats around Suyan Village (~2,200 m), upper montane forest at Paiela Road (~2,800–2,900 m) and subalpine grasslands at Waile Creek and the Porgera Reservoir (3,000–3,200 m). All of the sites, including the remote Lake Tawa valley, showed signs of human activities but they all (except Suyan Village) provided access to high-quality, relatively undisturbed habitats.

Reason for the RAP Survey

The flora and fauna of Enga Province are probably less well known than that of any other province in Papua New Guinea. The lack of information about Enga's biodiversity is surprising because the province hosts a major mine that has developed significant infrastructure in the vicinity of the mining operation, and because the conservation values of the vast Kaijende Highlands region were recognized nearly 20 years ago when this expanse of montane habitats was recommended for consideration as a Wildlife Management Area.

To redress this deficiency Conservation International, with support from the Porgera Joint Venture (PJV) mining operation, undertook a major Rapid Assessment Program (RAP) biodiversity survey to collect data on the species richness and conservation status of plants, herpetofauna, birds and mammals in the near-pristine montane habitats of the Kaijende Highlands. The information collected during this RAP expedition will be used to promote the conservation significance of this vast wilderness area to local communities and to the PNG Government. It will also be used to inform and guide future conservation activities in the region by local communities, the PJV mining operation, and government agencies at the provincial and national levels. We hope that the outstanding conservation values of the Kaijende Highlands