

# THE NEW EXPLORERS

## Expeditions

Expeditions are very important for a growing natural history museum. Not only is it an opportunity for a museum to obtain fresh collections for various research missions, it also allows the museum staff a chance to work with like-minded scientists from neighbouring countries. Regional collaborations of this type are integral to building up each other's strengths and bringing the researchers closer together.



An expedition to Pulau Tioman by the Raffles Museum in 1962

Expeditions are conducted for various reasons. They can be generic ones, just to make general collections. They can be targeted – for example, to explore a previously unexplored area and document its fauna and flora so that conservation decisions can be made judiciously.



Yunnan Newt, *Tylototriton sharjing*

Or they can be mission-oriented – to look for specific groups of organisms in order to accomplish a research goal, for example the revision of a selected group of plants or animals.

The old Raffles Museum was well known for its many successful expeditions. It was among the first organisations to systematically survey the famous Christmas Island (now part of Australia). It led the way with its many surveys of Pulau Tioman and Taman Negara National Park in Malaysia. Today, the new Raffles Museum continues this tradition. Over the last few years, Raffles Museum has launched several major and numerous minor expeditions to various parts of Southeast Asia, Indian Ocean and Pacific.

## Operation Xishuangbana (Yunnan 2000)

In May 2000, the museum conducted a joint survey of the Xishuangbana Basin in Yunnan, China, with the Xishuangbanna Tropical Botanic Gardens of the Chinese Academy of Science. The mission was to see how the diversity of key aquatic animal groups relates to the water quality and hydrology of the system.

Two scientists, a resident spider expert, Li Daiqin, and a visiting entomologist from Scripps, University of California, Lanna Cheng, as well as two graduate students, Tan Heok Hui and Cai Yixiong, worked with staff of the institute for two weeks in Yunnan.

In the return visit in 2001, four researchers from the institute, led by their Deputy Director, Liu Hongmao, worked in the Raffles Museum and spent two weeks studying the material with museum experts and preparing the reports. Both sides are now looking forward to a long-term collaboration in various aspects of biodiversity research.



The spectacular landscape of Yunnan



The popeye frog, *Paa yunnanensis*



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