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## Photographers RAVE about Yucatán

**Merida, Mexico (November 6th, 2009)** - A set of stunning photos released today show the natural beauty and conservation challenges facing the Yucatán Peninsula in Mexico in an eye-catching environmental portrait of one of the world's most remarkable places and also one of the most threatened.

An expedition of 32 leading conservation photographers undertaken from July to November resulted in a portfolio of hundreds of images that serve as a warning of the conservation status of this area known as the heart of the ancient Mayan civilization. The Rapid Assessment Visual Expedition or RAVE is a project of the International League of Conservation Photographers (ILCP), an initiative of the WILD Foundation.

The photos were released at the opening of the 9th World Wilderness Congress (WILD9) in Merida, Mexico. The event is gathering senior-level representation from governments, the private sector, native peoples and non-governmental organizations to address the role of conservation of wilderness areas in human well-being and climate stabilization.

"One of the goals of WILD9 is to inspire and illustrate how to make smarter choices about how we interact with nature. Mexico's rich biodiversity and vast wild places motivated WILD9 to convene in Merida. There is wonderful spirit of the land and traditional connection to nature that makes Mexico and the Yucatan very special," said Vance Martin, president of The Wild Foundation, and co-chairman of WILD9. "The RAVE and WILD9 forum aim to highlight the imperative to conserve important wild hotspots like the Yucatán Peninsula."

Located in the Mesoamerica Biodiversity Hotspot, the Yucatán Peninsula has an area larger than Greece (134,400 sq. km) spanning parts of Mexico, Belize and Guatemala. Its landscape is a mosaic of dry forests, lowland moist forest, underground rivers and mangroves that fringe the turquoise Caribbean Sea, but it is threatened by high rates of deforestation and biodiversity loss due to human activities, like population growth and unsustainable industrial and agricultural development.

"The Yucatán Peninsula contains about 25 percent of Mexico's total freshwater supply and high levels of species endemism. Efforts to conserve its forests and the biodiversity that lives in them are crucial to the well-being of the people who depend on it, and should be seen as an effective response to climate change as well," said Russ Mittermeier, President of Conservation International, a partner of the Yucatán RAVE.

The RAVE aimed to achieve a full visual assessment of the conservation condition of the Yucatán Peninsula in a short period of time with a team that included several specialized photographers (landscape, wildlife, macro, camera trapping, portraiture), writers and cameramen. ILCP's members explored a variety of habitats such as cenotes (or sinkholes), lagoons and mangroves in search of whale sharks, flamingos and other species to document their behavior and their surroundings.

Cristina Mittermeier, Executive Director of ILCP, said: "Photography is a powerful tool for conservation because it provokes emotions and invites people to reflect on the subjects being shown. Our goal with this expedition is to communicate visually the splendor and the threats to the Yucatán Peninsula. The conservation of its biodiversity is at a critical stage, but there is still abundant wildlife that can be preserved if development is planned in a more sustainable way."

“Mexico is blessed to have the WILD9 and the ILCP in Merida because the results of the congress and the RAVE will be used for improving our environmental policy and expanding the protection of wilderness in the Yucatan Peninsula. Amigos de Sian Ka’an, as well as all of the local non-governmental organizations and the national and state governments of Quintana Roo, Campeche and Yucatan have the duty to convert the work that this international cooperation has offered, into useful conservational tools,” said Gonzalo Merediz, Executive Director of Amigos de Sian Ka’an.

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Photos available here: <http://bit.ly/3zXOrE>

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**Notes to the Editor:**

**Definition of Biodiversity Hotspot:** A seminal paper by Norman Myers in 1988 first identified ten tropical forest “hotspots” characterized both by exceptional levels of plant endemism and by serious levels of habitat loss. In 1990 Myers added a further eight hotspots, including four Mediterranean-type ecosystems. Conservation International adopted Myers’ hotspots as its institutional blueprint in 1989, and in 1996, the organization made the decision to undertake a reassessment of the hotspots concept, including an examination of whether key areas had been overlooked. Three years later an extensive global review was undertaken, which introduced quantitative thresholds for the designation of biodiversity hotspots: To qualify as a hotspot, a region must meet two strict criteria: it must contain at least 1,500 species of vascular plants (> 0.5 percent of the world’s total) as endemics, and it has to have lost at least 70 percent of its original habitat. For more information visit: [www.biodiversityhotspots.org](http://www.biodiversityhotspots.org) or [www.conservation.org](http://www.conservation.org)

**RAVE details:** The Yucatán RAVE focuses on documenting the threats posed by deforestation, tourism, and forest fires on existing protected areas, important unprotected areas (i.e. corridors) and specific flagship species (i.e. Jaguar) throughout the Yucatán. The themes and threats of the RAVE include: Underground Wilderness, Impact of Tourism & Tourism Infrastructure Development, Coastal Environment, Freshwater, Mesoamerican Tropical Forests, Mayan Sites, Saltwater Intrusion, Ecological Impacts from Hurricanes, Habitat Fragmentation, Tourism Development, Mangrove Destruction, Coastal Island Development, and Biodiversity loss. To address those themes and threats the following geographic areas and species are the primary focus of the Yucatán RAVE: Cenotes, Caves, Mangroves, Calakmul Biosphere Reserve, Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve, Calakmul-Sian Ka'an Corridor, Rio Lagunas, Holbox,

Celestun, Chetumal, Sierra Caral, Amphibians, Jaguar, Manatees, Flamingos, Monkeys, Crocodiles, Whale Sharks, and Bats. For more information visit: <http://www.ilcp.com/rave>

**ILCP:** is a project-driven organization with a mission to translate conservation science into compelling visual messages. We work with leading scientists, governments, and conservation groups to produce the highest-quality documentary images of both the beauty and wonder of the natural world and the challenges facing it. The photographers of the ILCP are distinguished by the unique set of skills, talent and years of field experience documenting complex environmental subjects, and a commitment to conserve the landscapes, people, and wildlife in the places where they work. The work of ILCP photographers covers the entire range of threats to biodiversity and is a critical component in the conservation toolbox. For more information, visit [www.ilcp.com](http://www.ilcp.com)

**Amigos de Sian Ka'an:** Amigos de Sian Ka'an (ASK) is a non-profit, non-governmental organization established in June of 1986 by a group of scientists and conservationists concerned about preserving the wilderness of the state of Quintana Roo, Mexico. Its mission is the conservation of biodiversity, by promoting and influencing on the culture and policies, based on science. It concentrates its work on its Marine, Freshwater and Land Conservation Programs that are strategically planned to address four lines of action: scientific research, environmental policy, environmental education and public participation and awareness. ASK focuses its efforts within the state of Quintana Roo and collaborates with regional and international partners throughout the Mesoamerican region. It bases its conservation actions on scientific and technical information, on the planning and development of environmental policies and on the promotion of viable solutions for sustainable development. For more information visit: [www.amigosdesiankaan.org](http://www.amigosdesiankaan.org)