

# Orchids of Sichuan

**An Orchid Conservation Alliance – Orchids in the Wild Ecotour**  
**June 21 – July 3, 2025**

**Guide:** Wenqing Perner (Chengdu, China)

**OCA Representative:** Mary Gerritsen (San Mateo, CA)

**Participants:** Shala Butler (USA), Val Cinege (Australia), Sarah Hedean (USA), Peter Madders (UK), Tom Parks (USA)

**Bus Driver:** Mr. Yang Gang Zhang (“Mr. Jon”)

## June 21-Arrivals

Mary Gerritsen and Tom Parks had arrived in Chengdu a few days earlier to visit some local sights, including the Panda preserve, the infamous giant Chengdu Panda (hanging out on the side of an office/shopping mall building) and the Chengdu water diversion flood control



project. Another interesting sight was the Leshan Giant Buddha, the world’s largest sitting Buddha statue.

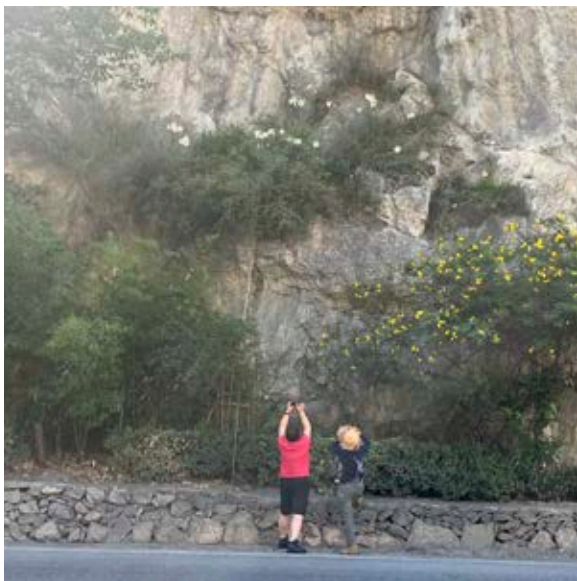
On the first day of the tour, Val Cinege

arrived slightly ahead of schedule; we picked her up at the hotel and made a quick trip to the Chengdu Botanical Gardens. Later, we met Peter Madders and shared a welcome dinner.

Due to weather delays, Sarah's and Shala's flights arrived much later that night.



## June 22-Trip to the Mountains



The entire group met for breakfast at the hotel before loading our bags onto the bus that would be our transport for the rest of the journey. We were introduced to the legendary “Mr. Jon,” our driver on many previous China trips.

Unfortunately, Sarah's and Shala's luggage was still in the USA and would have to catch up with us. Luckily, our first destination—the Seercuo Hotel in Huanglong—

included a three-night stay, making delivery easier.





*Amitostigma monanthum*

*Cypripedium amesianum*



On the way, we made several stops: fruit stands, photos of the locally common native *Lilium regale*, the Qiana forts and towers, scenic lakes, white yak photo-ops, and shopping in Songpan. We also enjoyed botanizing stops on the high pass (>13,000 ft) to Huanglong, where we photographed *Amitostigma monanthum*, *Cypripedium amesianum*, *Ponerorchis schlechteri*, and several species of *Ajuga*, *Androsace*, *Incarvillea*, and *Pedicularis*.



*Incarvillea compacta*



*Ponerorchis schlechteri*

We arrived in Huanglong after dark and enjoyed a delicious dinner at a local restaurant before settling into the Seercuo Hotel.

## June 23-Huanglong National Scenic Area

Today was one of the highlights of the trip: the trek up the spectacular Huanglong Valley, famous for its travertine pools, orchids, and wildflowers.

At the park entrance, we studied the map and chose to ascend via the forested trail, which has more orchids, fewer crowds, and fewer views of the pools (the main attraction for most tourists). Within minutes we



Map of Huanglong National Park. from: <https://www.asiaodysseytravel.com/jiuzhaigou/maps.html>

found our first orchids—tiny *Cypripedium bardolphianum*, alongside *Cypripedium flavum* and *Cypripedium tibeticum*. The forest floor was carpeted with the charming *Pedicularis artselaeri*. As we climbed the



*Cypripedium bardolphianum*



*Cypripedium tibeticum*



plank trail (what the National Park called the wooden boardwalk and stairs), orchids became abundant: *Cypripedium calcicola*, *Calypso bulbosa*, *Platanthera chlorantha*, and dozens of *Oreorchis nana*. Wildflowers included *Cardamine*, *Meconopsis* poppies, *Anemone*, marsh marigolds, *Corydalis*, tiny forget-me-nots, and several primrose species.



*Cypripedium flavum*



*Oreorchis nana*

Some participants descended by gondola, while others hiked to the top and walked back down. At over 10,000 ft, the altitude caused breathing difficulties, but portable oxygen canisters proved very helpful.







*Calypso bulbosa*



*Ponerorchis chusua*

That evening, we enjoyed another fine dinner. Best of all, Sarah's and Shala's luggage finally arrived at the hotel!

## June 24-Danyun Gorge and Floods

Heavy overnight rain dramatically affected this day. As we set out, we could see that the Fujiang River through Danyun Gorge was swollen, muddy, and turbulent. The road became increasingly littered with rocks and mud until, around one bend, it became impassable: the overnight torrent had transformed a small stream into a raging flood, sweeping large boulders across the road and submerging it entirely.

Turning back, we stopped to photograph *Cardiocrinum giganteum*.



River takes over the road!



*Cardiocrinum giganteum*



We searched an area where *Cypripedium sichuanense* and *Cyp. micranthum* had once grown, but sadly found no trace. Peter did discover an *Oreorchis* species we had not seen before. Flooding prevented visits to known sites of *Epipactis mairiae* and *Calanthe tricarinata*, but we did find large colonies of a *Pedicularis* sp.



Wenqing (shown for scale) next to *Cardiocrinum gigantea*

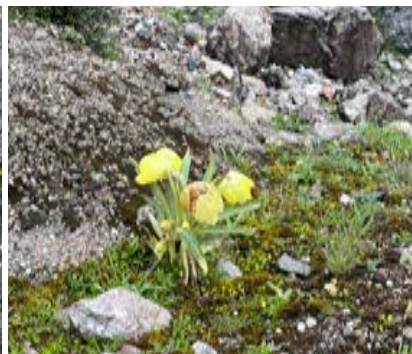


*Pedicularis* sp. next to road

After some uphill scrambling, we returned to Huanglong for a Tibetan-style handmade noodle lunch. Later, we crossed the high pass (13,000+ ft), photographing *Meconopsis*, *Androsace*, and *Incarvillea compacta*.



*Androsace silago*



*Meconopsis integrifolia*

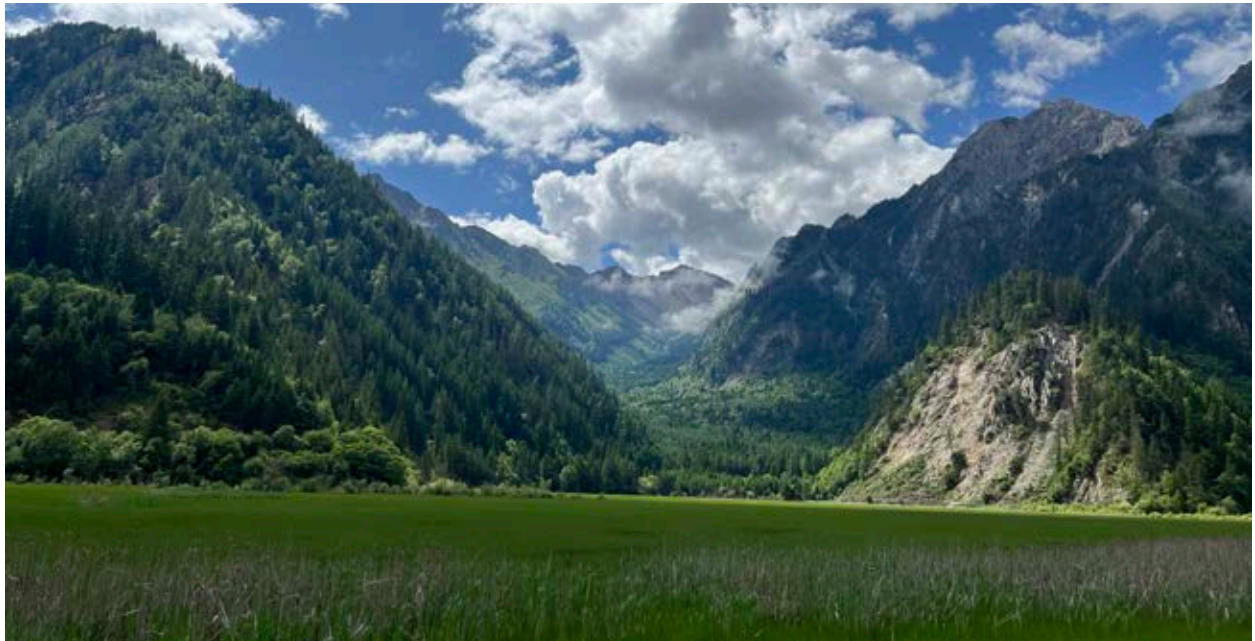


*Meconopsis punicea*



That evening, we arrived in Chuanzigou and checked into an ultra modern hotel complete with programmable toilets, heated floors and free laundry. A superb local dinner followed.

## June 25-Shenxianchi Scenic Area



One of the many gorgeous views in the Jiuzhaigou Valley

We journeyed through the Jiuzhaigou Valley, famed for its scenery, then turn up a side road Shenxianchi (Fairy Pool) Scenic Area, another travertine valley rich in orchids.



Similar to Huanglong, this valley featured beautiful blue reflecting pools, a plank trail up both sides of the valley and gorgeous overlooks. Interestingly, the road to the valley was one of the highlights! The road crossed over a high 13,000+ ft pass, and required negotiating a road with no less than 28 sharp switchbacks. At the top, vast rhododendron fields in white and purple stretched in all



directions.

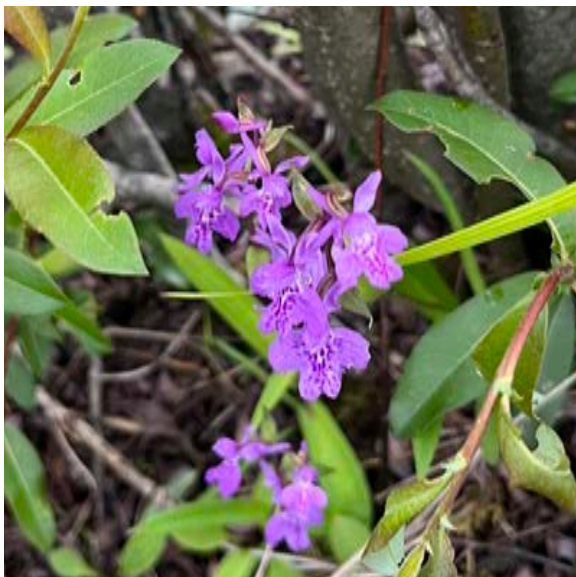
Descending, we explored a forest near the park entrance filled with blooming *Paeonia veitchii*. Orchids included *Cypripedium calcicola*, while other wildflowers and shrubs added color. After a picnic, we rode an electric tram deeper into the valley. Since our last visit, a patio and teahouse had sadly been built over a site that had hundreds of *Cypripedium flavum*. Still, we found more *Cyp. flavum*, *Cyp. shanxiense*, *Calanthe delavayi*, and *Ponerorchis chusua*.



*Paeonia veitchii*



*Cypripedium calcicola*



*Ponerorchis chusua*



*Cypripedium shanxiense*





Travertine pools



*Calanthe delavayi*

On the return, we botanized along the hillsides, finding *Fritillaria*, *Corydalis*, *Ajuga*, and photographed striking rhododendrons. We also spotted *Arisaema* (cobra lilies) near the 28-turn section.



*Rhodendron* sp.



*Fritillaria przewalskii*

## June 26-Jiuzhaigou and Roadtrip to Wanglang

We stayed overnight in Jiuzhaigou, then set out for the Wanglang Panda Reserve. En route, we detoured to the Golden Snub-Nosed Monkey Reserve.



Golden snub nosed monkeys. Image from <https://govt.chinadaily.com.cn>  
Hope we can actually see them next time!

Wenqing had been told it would open to the public in 2024, but upon arrival we learned it would not open until October 2025. The buildings were complete, but the gates remained shut.

With time to spare, we explored a side road. Within a few miles, we found *Hemerocallis fulva* (common daylily) and *Lilium pumilum*. The nearby forest yielded *Hemipilia flabellata*, saxifrage, *Corallodiscus*, and *Arisaema*. A little further along, we stopped at a waterfall, then passed





through orchards of Sichuan peppers, cherries, peaches, and persimmons. At a roadside stand, we stocked up on fruit—the cherries were especially outstanding. We paused in a village for handmade noodle soup, watching the cook prepare noodles in the kitchen. Back on the highway, we encountered a major traffic jam caused by a landslide that had been caused by the heavy rains a few days before. Crews were still clearing massive boulders and mud.

Passing the turnoff for Wanglang, we continued into the upper valley, where *Lilium davidii* still bloomed in one spot known from previous trips. Returning back towards Wanglang, we visited a Baima village, meeting a woman in traditional dress who kindly posed for a group photo. Our overnight stay was in a Tibetan-style guesthouse, where we enjoyed hot pot for dinner. The rooms featured “Tibetan toilets”—a combined shower and toilet with water draining through the floor. Thankfully, this time there were flush toilets.



## June 27-Wanglang Park

At Wanglang Park headquarters, we were met by staff and a documentary film crew, who planned to feature our visit on Chinese television.

We explored the first valley, finding an extraordinary variety of orchids: *Cypripedium flavum*, *Cyp. tibeticum*, *Cyp. calcicola*, *Cyp. guttatum*, *Cyp. bardolphianum*, and the rare *Cyp. farreri*. Other orchids included *Oreorchis nana*, *Calanthe delavayi*, *Galearis roborovskii*, *Gymnadenia conopsea*, *Platanthera minutiflora*, *Ponerorchis chusua*, and the recently described *Ponerorchis (Hemipilia) amplexifolia*. We searched for the hybrid *Cyp. × wenqingii* (*Cyp. farreri* × *Cyp. tibeticum*), but found none. Mary gave a short interview to the film crew.



A colony of *Cypripedium guttatum*



*Cypripedium farreri*

After a picnic, we moved to an adjacent valley and hiked along a forest creek. Highlights included *Malaxis monophyllos*, a different *Oreorchis* species, and the rare *Risleya atropurpurea*. We also discovered four healthy *Cypripedium palangshanense*. Near the bus we added *Oreorchis indica* and *Platanthera fuscescens* to our list.





Exploring the orchid rich valley at Wanglang



Three orchids growing together: *Cyp. tibeticum*, *Cyp. flavum* and *Calanthe delavayi*



Lots of *Cyp. tibeticum*!



*Cyp. calcicola*



*Ponerorchis amplexifolia*







*Coeloglossum viride*



*Risleya atropurpurea*



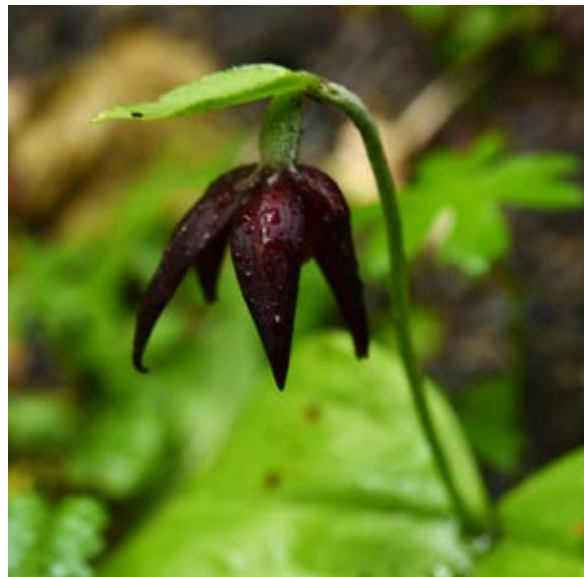
*Galearis roborowskii*



*Platanthera minutiflora*



*Malaxis monophyllos*



*Cypripedium palangshanense*



Returning to the guesthouse, we made a few more stops for ferns and *Arisaema*. That evening we packed for the next day's departure.

## June 28-Aba Grasslands

Today's destination was the Aba grasslands, situated on the eastern edge of the Tibet-Qinghai Plateau. This region supports diverse wildlife and an incredible variety of alpine flora. Along the way, we stopped at a Buddhist monastery and enjoyed a dumpling lunch before climbing the steep slopes leading to the grasslands. The road was vastly improved over a previous trip made here in 2012.

Reaching the summit, we botanized among *Iris*, *Meconopsis*, *Pedicularis*, *Ajuga*, *Corydalis*, *Fritillaria*, *Primula*, and asters—and even found a yak skull. Further along, we spotted black-necked cranes and, memorably, a flock of Himalayan griffons near the road. Our progress was halted by a massive traffic jam caused by yet another landslide. The backup stretched for miles, with hundreds of heavy trucks. Our bus squeezed between lanes, finally breaking free after two hours, only to encounter yet another jam near Hongyuan, where we stayed overnight.



*Fritillaria unibracteata*



*Meconopsis sinomaculata?*



*Pedicularis sp.*



*Corydalis flexuosa*



*Ajuga ovalifolia*



*Meconopsis punicea*



*Stellera chamaejasme*





Black-necked crane  
*Grus nigricollis*



Himalayan griffon  
*Gyps himalayensis*



## June 29-Aba Grasslands and Kalong Valley

Before leaving the grasslands, we botanized further, finding colonies of *Dactylorhiza hatagirea*, *Cremanthodium brunneopilosum*, *Pedicularis*, gentians, *Primula*, *Ajuga*, and a spectacular stand of *Meconopsis*



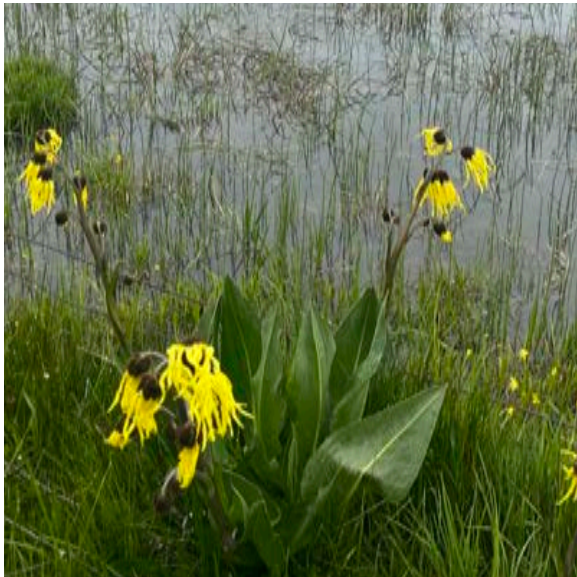
*integrifolia*. We also bought excellent local yogurt, which we enjoyed over the next two days.



*Pedicularis* sp.



*Pedicularis* sp.



*Cremanthodium brunneopilosum*



*Dactylorhiza hatagirea*







*Platanthera chlorantha* ?



Pink lilac



Beautiful Tibetan Village



We then headed towards the Kalong Valley, passing through narrow canyons and Tibetan villages. At one stop, wildflowers included *Geranium*, *Anemone*, lilac, and a *Platanthera* species. Another village offered a surprise: a coffee shop with freshly baked bread.

That evening we stayed at the Platinum Crystal Hotel in Luhazhen (Heishui County). Everything in this hotel was lovely—clean rooms, reliable amenities, and free laundry! After a short stroll into town for some shopping, we had a delightful dinner at a local restaurant.

## June 30-Kalong Valley

The road into Kalong Valley began with tunnels replacing the old switchback road over a high pass that we had taken on previous tours. We passed several towns with elaborate, brightly painted homes and shops. However, about 29 km from Kalong, ongoing road construction blocked our bus. Wenqing made a few phone calls, and soon we walked the short distance across the construction zone and were shuttled the remaining distance to the park by locals.







Kalong is yet another of the travertine valleys, with multiple blue ponds, lush vegetation, and wildflowers everywhere. The valley had suffered severe storm damage, likely from the same storm a few days earlier that had caused the landslides and floods throughout the region. The streams were still swollen, vegetation scoured away, and even many of the orchids washed away. Still, we managed to find treasures—*Paeonia veitchii* (mostly white forms), *Anemone*, and two large colonies of *Cypripedium guttatum* (well over 100 plants total). Higher up we located *Cypripedium calcicola*, *Cyp. shanxiense*, and *Oreorchis nana*.



*Paeonia veitchii* (white form)



*Cypripedium shanxiense*

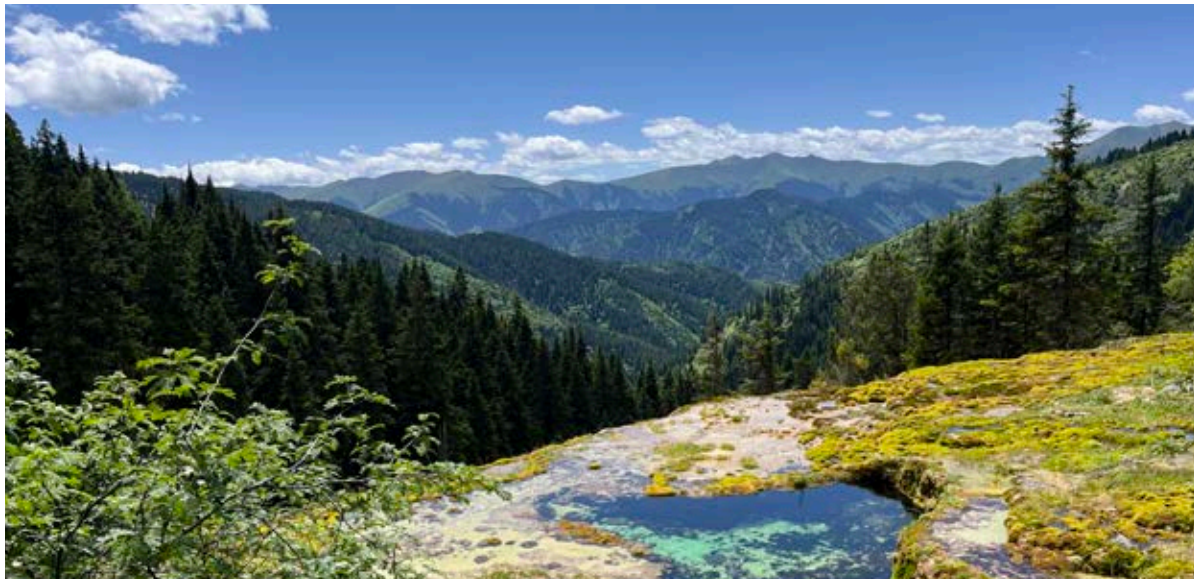




*Cypripedium guttatum*



*Caltha palustris*



After a very long arduous climb, the view from the top of the Kalong Valley was exhilarating

Descending was exhausting, especially after detouring around a landslide that destroyed part of the plankway. We finally rejoined Mr. Jon and returned to our hotel.

## July 1 – Return to Chengdu

Most of the day was spent driving highways, traversing tunnels, and crossing dams. Highlights included:

- *Lilium regale* in full bloom outside a local home



- An authentic, unrestored Tibetan village where we bought mushrooms, rocks, and Sichuan peppers
- The reconstructed ancient castle of Erina with dancers in traditional dress
- A moving memorial for the 2008 Sichuan earthquake, which preserved the ruins of a collapsed school where 63 children and 8 adults died.





By evening we were back in Chengdu. After refreshing at the hotel, we enjoyed a Sichuan theater performance with dinner. (thank you Peter Madders for the photos!)



## July 2 – Hengduan Biotech Nursery

We toured the nursery's greenhouses and outdoor orchid plantings, then visited vast lotus fields. Lunch in an air-conditioned restaurant was followed by a silk museum tour and shopping at a silk handicraft store.





After saying our goodbyes to Mr. Jon, that evening we shared a delicious farewell dinner at the hotel with Wenqing. All participants said their goodbyes and retired early to pack and get ready for our trips home the following day.

## **July 3 – Departures**

Torrential rain and thunderstorms were forecast, making everyone anxious. Fortunately, all flights departed before Chengdu was inundated by flooding that later closed streets, subways, and the airport. A “just in time” escape!