



Alliance for Tompotika Conservation Aliansi Konservasi Tompotika

NEWSLETTER

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The Biodiversity Crisis: We all have a part to play

The statistics are grim: 21% of all known mammals. 29% of all known amphibians. 12% of birds. 35% of conifers and cycads. 17% of sharks, 27% of reef-building corals... the list goes on. These, according to the IUCN--the international body that keeps track of all the Earth's plants and animals--are the proportions of our planet's wondrous variety of life forms that are threatened with extinction, due largely to human activities.

But here is the good news: overwhelmingly, the right things to do to save biodiversity are also the right things to slow climate change and promote human health and quality of life as well. Control human population growth. Curb consumption. Develop alternative energies. Eat lower on the food chain. Halt deforestation and ocean degradation. And so on; we've all heard the solutions.

And we all must do our part. In Tompotika, folks consume comparatively little, but with ALTO's help they are changing their habits: no longer consuming maleo eggs, for example, or clearing forests. But as a true partnership, ALTO calls on its members from the Global Consumer Class to do their part as well: we simply must stop increasing--and start reducing--our consumption. Human quality of life--and so much *life* itself--depends on it.



2010 International Year of Biodiversity

**Biodiversity is life.
Biodiversity is our life.**

Putting Trash in its Place: *New Awareness, New Habits in Tompotika*

It's no secret: Indonesia has a serious problem with litter and trash. Like most countries that have not yet invested concerted attention and resources into proper trash management in the plastics era, Indonesia's towns, roads, waterways and beaches are all too often full of trash of many kinds. What's



Albatross chick found dead on Midway Atoll in the Pacific. This and thousands of other chicks have been found with stomachs full of plastic debris that their parents mistook for food.

Photo: Chris Jordan

more, as the world is beginning to realize, **the trash we generate on land doesn't necessarily stay there; from the shores of Indonesia's islands, floating trash travels East to the North Pacific Gyre, where it joins that of other nations in the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, a mass of floating debris roughly the size of Borneo.** On the journey from producer to Gyre, humanity's garbage fouls beaches, entangles sea turtles and other wildlife, clogs waterways, damages coral reefs, and disrupts the

food web; it has been estimated that over a million marine mammals, birds, turtles, and other wildlife are killed each year by trash. **In Tompotika, the harm done by litter and trash to the health and well-being of both people and wildlife is direct and obvious.**

Until a few months ago, folks in Tompotika had no formal trash management practices at all. From time to time, trash might be collected into a heap on the beach or roadside, and someone might set fire to the heap--but generally, on discarding a plastic bag, food wrapper, or bit of string, folks would simply let the item fall to the ground, for wind and rain to transport as they would.

But now that's changing. **This August, ten ALTO Eco-Service travelers helped usher in a new, three-part approach to managing trash in Tompotika.** These three components consist of cleaning up litter (*what does a clean environment look like?*); introducing new, responsible trash reduction and management practices (*how can we keep it that way?*); and launching a new school-

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ALTO travelers and villagers after a beach clean-up in Taima.

Trish Mace

The Next Five Years in Taima: Healthy Maleos, Happy People

This August, AITo and the village of Taima renewed their commitment to work together on maleo bird conservation for another five years. Since our collaboration began in 2006, over 5000 maleo eggs have been saved from poaching, the number of adult maleos coming to lay at the Taima nesting ground has tripled, and Taima has made a name for itself in international conservation. Villagers, somewhat tentative about the project when it first began, have now embraced it wholeheartedly, and were only too eager to renew the agreement. Not only the maleos have



Noval Suling

AITo staff Ikhsan, Agus, and Anim, Director Marcy Summers, Taima Village Head Pak Hasdin, and a maleo statue "friend" celebrate the signing of the renewed agreement.

benefited: the package of community benefits that Taima has received as a conservation village includes everything from new roofing for its mosque to a bicycle for guards' transport to eyeglasses for the elderly. It's a win-win for all.

The Alliance for Tompotika Conservation/ Aliansi Konservasi Tompotika ("AITo") is dedicated to conserving the unparalleled natural and cultural heritage of the lands and waters surrounding Mt. Tompotika, Sulawesi, Indonesia. Effective, innovative, and efficient, AITo protects endangered species, tropical rainforests, and coral reefs while promoting the dignity and self-sufficiency of local communities in a changing world. In Tompotika and everywhere, AITo believes that the quality of our human lives is bound up to the health of our natural environment and our relationships to it.

AITo is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization in the United States and a registered Yayasan in Indonesia, made possible by your donations. Thank you for your support!

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Butterfly by AITo Conservation Coordinator Anim Alyoihana

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Proper Disposal: Why Incinerate?

Reduce, Reuse, Recycle: these are the well-known watchwords of proper trash management. Tompotikans produce only a tiny fraction of the trash that members of the Global Consumer Class do, and they are masters of reuse. But alas, in Indonesia, even in population centers like Jakarta, recycling is in its infancy. **Much as we might prefer it, the energy required to collect and transport the (comparatively) small, dispersed amounts of trash that Tompotikans produce would do more damage to the climate than can be justified even if recycling facilities were available in the region, which they are not.** Similarly, landfilling is not an attractive option; here landfills tend to be poorly-managed, prone to spontaneous combustion, and full of rats.

So, after consulting with village leaders and thoroughly researching the options, assisted by 2009 AITo eco-traveler, retired engineer, and volunteer Peter Gerber, **we settled on small-scale incineration as the next best step for Tompotika trash disposal.** While not the perfect solution, incineration is a huge improvement over the two existing trash "management" practices: burning it in a damp, smoky, toxic heap; or leaving it lying about, to be eventually carried out to sea.

Our world-wide search yielded a number of small incinerators. We chose one that not only had the best record for burning cleanly (meeting the US's, the European Union's, and the WHO's strict standards for incineration), but also happened to be built nearby. The DD-Midi, built by the non-profit Yayasan Dian Desa in Indonesia, is made of simple, easily-maintained-and-repaired materials, and burns cleanly (about 1000° C) in a two-chambered design. The incineration ash from this trash (plastic and paper) is generally non-toxic and is being buried in small batches in carefully-chosen locations.

If after a trial period this first "pilot" incinerator is judged to work well, we hope to help install additional incinerators in other parts of Tompotika, so that folks all over truly can, **"Buanglah sampah pada tempatnya!" or, "Put trash in its place!"**



Trish Mace

At rear, the newly-installed "DD Midi" is preparing to burn the 128 bags of trash picked up by the AITo-villager teams in Teku village.

Putting Trash in its Place in Tompotika *(continued from page 1)*

based Awareness Campaign (*why does it matter?*) The beach clean-ups were celebratory affairs, with the AITo travelers joined by hundreds of villagers in each village. **Working together, everybody--from infants to octogenarians--fanned out across the beaches, picking up plastic juice and water cups, old flip-flops, plastic bags, fragments of fish netting, cigarette packs, foil soup-noodle flavor packets--all kinds of mostly plastic trash.** One group of enthusiastic girls even set to work to pick up, one by one, the tiny round white beads of styrofoam that had broken off and littered the beach surrounding an abandoned fishing float.

And the yield was good: in Teku village, for instance, the teams picked up 128 bags of trash from 6 km (~ 4 mi) of beach, and villagers learned how their new incinerator (see article opposite) would safely dispose of



Jeannette Barreca

that and all future garbage. To top it off, a set of new trash bins, provided by AITo and made locally from recycled truck tires, were installed around town, whereupon children eagerly ran around picking up village trash to fill them up. (Trash will be collected on an ongoing basis as part of the new program.) As another part of the effort, thanks to a generous AITo donor, village women were given canvas bags to use for their shopping in place of the ubiquitous plastic ones. At the end of the day, villagers and AITo travelers celebrated the launch of the new trash management program with food, a dance performance by local middle schoolers, and a clever anti-littering skit invented by local high school students working together with three teenage AITo travelers. **To reinforce and support the new trash management program, in schools throughout Tompotika AITo staff will be presenting a newly-designed Awareness program on the subject,**



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AITo Conservation Officer Panji helps introduce the new Trash Awareness Campaign to elementary school children. The poster was designed by artist and AITo volunteer Sandra Noel.

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Focusing on trash--even as it may seem a less weighty issue than, say, biodiversity loss, deforestation, climate change, or other environmental crises of our time--**has brought with it some unexpected benefits.** Trash is the ultimate grassroots issue; *everybody* produces it, and for folks in Tompotika who may not be accustomed to thinking in this way, trash provides a vehicle for *everybody* also to pay attention to their relationship to their environment, and how their behavior affects other creatures and the planet: the beginnings of a conservation ethic. Putting trash in its place is one simple, initial step that everyone can take to help move us all in the right direction. As Pak Ilham Lasandre, Village Head of Teku, put it as he addressed the entire community at the clean-up event, **“This is not just an activity for today, but for tomorrow, and next week, and next year. It’s time to make a new change and a new start.”**



Trish Mace

Children filled the first new AITo-installed trash bin in Teku in a jiffy. The majority of the village’s trash is plastic food packaging.



Sulawesi Flying Fox

Photo: Robin Moore

The Bats are Back!

Great news! After an absence of more than four months, the bats of Tompotika’s Bat and Turtle Island, or *Pulau Tangkuladi*, have returned. As reported in AITo’s February 2010 newsletter, this small uninhabited offshore island has for years hosted a rare colony of Sulawesi Flying Foxes, *Acerodon celebensis*--a large fruit-eating bat found only in Sulawesi. Sulawesi’s bat populations are believed to be experiencing sharp declines, in large part because of a surge in hunting for the bushmeat trade. Although not consumed locally, Tangkuladi’s thousands of bats suddenly disappeared completely a few months back, after a period of especially intense hunting pressure.

Everyone feared the worst--that this colony, like so many others like it--might be gone forever. But just as suddenly, the bats have reappeared! Even better: the bats’ departure gave the AITo team and local villagers an opportunity to glimpse what losing them would be like. Villagers’ response: they are now more eager than ever to work with AITo to ensure the bats’ protection.



This juvenile hawksbill turtle had been kept in this plastic basin for 4 months. To prevent her from escaping, a hole was drilled in her shell and a piece of fishing line tethered her in place.



The Faces of ALTO: Captive turtles and their release

In the focal villages where ALTO's field programs work with locals to prevent it, sea turtle poaching is coming to an end. In addition, ALTO's Awareness Campaign spreads the word in every school and village in Tompotika: sea turtles are fully protected by Indonesian and international law, and may not be killed, traded or held for any reason.

But change takes time, and outside these areas if you ask around during the turtle season you may discover that the family down the road has a sea turtle in their back yard. Often the turtle will be a juvenile, and you will likely find it in a plastic basin. Typically, the basin is too small for the turtle to stretch out its neck and limbs, and the water is a distressing murky color. It may have been there for days or months, and it may be weak and listless, or it may be surprisingly vigorous. Sometimes the family will tell you that their children care for it as a pet: *he changes the water every day*. Sometimes they will frankly admit that they are just keeping it for sale: *when the Chinese guys come along, they will pay a high price for green turtle meat*. But ALTO's goal is always the same--to persuade the family to give up the turtle: either to release it themselves back to the sea, or to give it to us to do so.

The persuasion is not easy. ALTO staff start by explaining that sea turtles are endangered, that they are fully protected by law and that Tompotika is one of the few places where they still live and breed. This may be news to folks, but it's generally not enough, by itself, to convince them to relinquish their turtle. Sometimes they ask for money, and sometimes we give some. But even this, we have found, is not the most powerful argument. What works best of all? Here's what we've found: call on folks' better selves. Ask them to set a good example for their children. When reminded that the children are watching, that setting the turtle free is an act of respect for the law and of hope for their kids' future ability to show sea turtles to *their* children, we've found that even the most cynical turtle captor tends to shrug and hand it over.

A little later: the moment of exhilaration, for villagers and ALTO folks alike. That's the moment when, brought back home to the sea, the turtle flaps its limbs and swims away. Everyone watches it out of sight, their faces shining with grins.



ALTO travelers brought the above-pictured hawksbill to a nearby beach for release.