



# Alliance for Tompotika Conservation Aliansi Konservasi Tompotika

May 2008 Newsletter

## ALTo launches new sea turtle conservation program

**“The earth nurses these eggs. They are planted in the earth, and the earth takes care of them...the earth and sun are kind to them.” – Henry David Thoreau, on the nests of sea turtles**

For global sea turtle conservation, there is no place more important than Indonesia: six of the world’s seven sea turtle species are found in Indonesian waters. In the Tompotika area, local people recognize four common types of sea turtles, and ALTo has been able to confirm that **at least three species, Green turtles (*Chelonia mydas*), Hawksbill turtles (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) and giant Leatherback turtles (*Dermochelys coriacea*) nest on Tompotika beaches.** When ready to lay her eggs, a female sea turtle—after migrating perhaps thousands of miles between her feeding and nesting grounds\*—laboriously hauls herself up on a familiar sandy beach and deposits about 100 eggs in the warm sand. Weeks later, hatchlings emerge all at once from the sand and descend to the sea, where they must find food and dodge predators for 20 years or more before maturing enough to reproduce themselves. But until now, few turtle hatchlings in Tompotika ever saw the light of day. **Poaching of sea turtle eggs and adult turtles is widespread in Indonesia, and due to these and other threats, such as destruction of beach nesting habitat, plastic trash in the ocean, and fishing by-catch, global sea turtle populations are plummeting.**



Green turtle, *Chelonia mydas*

But new hope for sea turtles has hatched in Tompotika. With help from a grant from the IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature) Marine Turtle Specialist Group, ALTo has just launched a new sea turtle conservation and awareness campaign. **ALTo’s on-the-ground turtle conservation work will center in two of Tompotika’s most critical turtle nesting areas near the villages of Teku (see below), and Taima, where turtles use some of the same beaches we’re already protecting for the endangered maleo bird.** As in the maleo program, ALTo has recruited and “converted” former expert turtle poachers to help locate, and now protect, adult turtles and their nests. In addition, **our Conservation Awareness campaign is bringing news of the plight of sea turtles, as well as information on their protected status under Indonesian and international law, to children and adults all over the Tompotika area.** And although changing local habits of turtle exploitation will take time, villagers’ early reactions have been very encouraging. As one local man observed, while giving ALTo permission to release two turtles he’d been holding captive, **“We approve of releasing these turtles. The children loved the program the ALTo staff put on. We didn’t know they were protected, but now your message has been received.”**



ALTo traveler Logan Searl releases a young adult green turtle near the village of Teku.

\*Recently, a female leatherback turtle was radiotracked as she migrated from her nesting grounds in Indonesia to feed off the Oregon Coast—a journey of 12,774 miles.

## Teku: unearthing a hidden treasure in Tompotika

It's as if we've discovered a glittering jewel in the soil at our feet! Recently, while in the area conducting Conservation Awareness meetings, AIto staff were approached by community leaders from Teku, a little-known coastal village Southeast of Mt. Tompotika. The villagers' message said, in effect, **"We have heard of your work to conserve maleo birds. We have maleos nesting near our village, as well as other wildlife. We would like to work with you on a conservation program."** So, in April a team from AIto spent several days in Teku to take a closer look; what we discovered left us awestruck. Teku's compact village of about 1000 people is flanked by **intact native rainforests; long, sandy sea turtle nesting beaches; fringing coral reefs; natural grassland balds and headlands; four active maleo nesting areas; and two unique and biologically rich mixed salt- and freshwater lagoons.**

Each of these natural areas is prime habitat for wildlife ranging from maleos, storks and eagles to tarsiers and cuscuses to dolphins and sea turtles, and all are in excellent condition. The lagoons are even said to contain crocodiles, which have been extirpated from nearly all other parts of Sulawesi. In response to their invitation, AIto has begun working with villagers to initiate a new conservation program in Teku, beginning with maleos and sea turtles. This is how a good thing grows. Stay tuned!

*The village of Teku comprises two pristine brackish-water lagoons like this one, both rich with birds and other wildlife.*



### Be aware or be square

AIto's Conservation Awareness campaign is going strong. Each month, **AIto Conservation Officers Anim, Ikhsan, Agus, Noval, Ipan and Ardat travel to 6-10 villages in the Tompotika area, holding meetings and workshops in schools and village centers, and reaching 800-1000 people per month, about 80% of them children.** These interactive gatherings on conservation matters prompt great enthusiasm and excellent questions, such as, "Why is the maleo's egg so huge?" or "What can we do to prevent illegal logging?" At nearly all sites, we've been invited to return often, as a regular part of the education of Tompotika kids & adults.

**Wish List** Can you help? AIto needs these items:

- sturdy laptop computer (PC)
- digital camera
- headlamps

**Check out our website! *Kunjungi situs kami!*** Many thanks to John Cornelison of Vashon Software for his expert help in setting up our bilingual website, [www.tompotika.org](http://www.tompotika.org).

AIto works to protect endangered species and build an enduring conservation ethic in Tompotika, Sulawesi, Indonesia and beyond. Our work is made possible by your support—thank you! ***If you would prefer to receive future AIto news by e-mail, please let us know at [tompotika@centurytel.net](mailto:tompotika@centurytel.net).*** This newsletter is printed on 100% PCW recycled paper.



*Tompotika schoolchildren after an AIto Awareness Campaign meeting, proudly displaying their new maleo poster and cheering "Hidup Maleo!" ("Long Live the Maleo!").*

- solar-powered lamps, flashlights, batteries and chargers



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