



# Alliance for Tompotika Conservation Aliansi Konservasi Tompotika

NEWSLETTER

VOL. V, NO. 1 FEBRUARY 2010

## Be Part of the Solution! Join ALTo's 2010 Eco-Service Tour & Tompotika Trash Jamboree

Perhaps you've heard of the ever-growing mass of floating garbage that's accumulating in the Pacific Ocean. In Tompotika, this same type of trash fouls beaches and villages, entangles wildlife, and interferes with nesting sea turtles. It's time to do something about it.

**July 25-August 8, 2010**, travelers with ALTo's annual small-group Eco-Service tour to Tompotika will join with villagers to clean up trash in Tompotika villages and beaches--and usher in new methods for sound trash management in the area. Granted: picking up trash is unglamorous work. But the beach clean-ups will have a festive, light-hearted spirit, with skits, "art from trash," and village celebrations accompanying the work. You'll be working side-by-side with local Tompotikans, and you'll be making a very visible, tangible difference. We guarantee it will be fun!

And as for glamour--the splendor of Tompotika's tropical rainforests, coral reefs, and rare wildlife will be all around us, as we take plenty of time for hiking, (*see Trash Trip, next page*)



Discarded plastics are a hazard to marine wildlife. Sea turtles mistake plastic bags for jellyfish, a favorite food.

Alejandro Fallabrino seaturtle.org

## The endangered Maleo, up from the grave: *See what recovery looks like!*



*Maleo*, Watercolor by ALTo Conservation Officer Noval Suling.

The maleo bird, *Macrocephalon maleo*, found only on Indonesia's island of Sulawesi, is one of the most evolutionarily unique and globally endangered of all birds. No other bird is like it: instead of incubating its eggs by sitting on them (as do most birds overall), or by building mounds of heat-producing vegetation (as do most birds in the maleo's family, the Megapodes), the maleo is the original Alternative Energy Innovator: maleos warm their eggs using solar or geothermal energy.

Theirs is an utterly unique story. Adult maleos mate for life, and spend most of their time in Sulawesi's tropical rainforests. When it is time to lay, the maleo pair begin a journey, primarily on foot, to their traditional communal nesting area, coming home like salmon to their birthplace. In Tompotika, one of the few places where this rare bird has not yet disappeared, this migration takes them down from the forested slopes of Mt. Tompotika, past croplands and villages (which, if they are built too close to forested maleo corridors, the birds will refuse to traverse), and finally to the nesting ground near the village of Taima, where maleos have nested for as long as anyone can remember. Once at the nesting ground, the maleos begin to dig, in a process that takes hours and may span days. The male and female together dig a deep pit in the sand--complete with false starts and decoy pits--and when she is ready, the female lays one single, enormous egg in this sandy pit, perhaps a yard deep. The pair then cover the egg back up with sand, "shake the dust off their feet," and return to the rainforest whence they came; their job is done. The egg is left to incubate in the sun-warm sand for about 80 days.



A maleo pair begins their morning digging at the Taima nesting ground.

Scott Newell

This is where, thanks to ALTo, the next chapter of maleo life begins, rather than ends; the sand that had become the maleo's grave is now again its birthplace. Prior to ALTo's involvement at the Taima nesting ground, virtually every single maleo egg was dug up and sold as a luxury item, rather like caviar (the eggs were not needed for subsistence.) Local villagers (*see Maleo, next page*)

**Trash Trip, continued** snorkeling, and enjoying wild nature. In addition to leaving things cleaner and healthier everywhere we go, we'll have the chance to swim with schools of vibrantly-colored reef fishes, explore the mysterious jungles of Tompotika, witness the nightly migration of flying foxes, watch tiny primate tarsiers leap among the trees, and observe nesting maleo birds, back from the brink of extinction.

A previous year's AITo traveler described the trip this way: "The [AITo trip] was a life-changing experience for me. It was a pleasure to spend time with people who not only love to travel, but care deeply about environmental and social issues... The trip included hiking rainforest areas, snorkeling over gorgeous coral reefs and many other adventures too numerous to mention. The other exciting and hopeful part of the journey was seeing school children and local people so deeply involved... I think we all really felt a part of something very positive and in this world today, that is a rare and wonderful thing."

The 15-day trip runs July 25-August 8 and costs \$2900 (not including international airfare) if you register by March 1; \$3000 thereafter. For more information, contact AITo or visit our website at [www.tompotika.org](http://www.tompotika.org).

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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**Maleo, continued** carefully regulated the privilege of taking maleo eggs, but not a one was left for the future-- despite the fact that the birds are fully protected under Indonesian law, and all such egg-taking is illegal. Before local villagers and AITo worked together to convert Taima's egg poachers to egg guardians and data-recorders, the story of the maleo's giant egg ended abruptly; virtually no chicks hatched, and the Taima nesting ground, like scores of others all over Sulawesi, seemed doomed to end in oblivion.

But that was back in 2006. Since then, AITo and Taima villagers have worked together to safeguard all maleo adults and their eggs, so that nowadays, the maleo story goes on. After 80 days of solar incubation under the sand, the maleo chick hatches. Its first task is to dig its way out of the sand, and over the next 24-48 hours it labors, kicking with its feet, a yard or more to the surface. Emerging at night, the new chick pops out of the sand and rests for a few minutes. Then, fully-feathered, open-eyed, independent, off it flies to make its way on its own in the big new world.



Maleo chick, Oil pastel by AITo Conservation Officer Panji Kresno

The maleo is coming back in Tompotika. Nowadays at the Taima nesting ground, the throaty calls of maleos have become a din, and are mixed with squawks and squabbles as the birds crowd each other's nesting digs. Sometimes there are so many birds that AITo's staff and villager maleo guards have trouble keeping an accurate count (these are great problems to have!) In the nearby forests, local people report sightings of juvenile maleos--funny-looking fuzzy-headed creatures that previously were unknown.

And, next month, AITo will join with Sulawesi's few other existing maleo conservation projects in a conference to plan recovery efforts for the maleo across its range. As serious as are the threats facing the maleo, in Tompotika we have proved: extinction need not be the last word for the maleo. Recovery is possible. It's time to spread that faith and that know-how, and make it happen beyond Tompotika. And for those who have supported AITo's efforts since 2006: **thank you**. Look what you have done!



When our work at the Taima nesting ground began in 2006, peak nesting season brought, at most, 10-12 birds in a day. Now scenes like this one, showing 25 birds at once, are routine.

## Protecting the Whole, Protecting the Parts: Bat & Turtle Island

At the Alliance for Tompotika Conservation, we talk about “ridge to reef” conservation, focusing both our field and outreach programs on the interconnectedness of Earth’s systems, of which humans are a part. In Tompotika, the tropical rainforests, coral reefs, unique wildlife, and human inhabitants all depend upon one another’s presence and good health in order just to exist, let alone to thrive.

A perfect example of this interconnectedness is illustrated by Bat & Turtle Island, a small, uninhabited island just off the coast of Tompotika’s village of Taima--the same village that hosts the maleo nesting ground nearby. Ringed by sandy beaches, Bat & Turtle Island is an important nesting place for sea turtles--because of its remoteness, it has been less subject to poaching over the years--and sea turtles, in turn, play a key role in the health of coral reefs and the marine ecosystem. But the island is also home to a large and rare colony of fruit bats, or flying foxes--in this case, the distinctive blond Sulawesi Flying Fox, *Acerodon celebensis*, which is found only in Sulawesi. These garrulous bats, with



Robin Moore

Bat Island hosts a rare colony of Sulawesi Flying Foxes. Though not consumed locally, the bat colony has recently been decimated by hunting for the bushmeat market.

but of the global climate and Earth as a whole--eventually would fail. Similarly, bats pollinate many important fruit trees grown by people in the area, such as bananas, cashews, papayas, and coconuts. One favorite fruit--the durian--is pollinated by bats and bats only.

But the bats of Bat Island have recently come under dire threat. In the last year, hunters have “discovered” the island, and netted and killed bats by the thousands--not for consumption by locals, but for bushmeat markets far away. Slow to reproduce, the bats cannot withstand such hunting pressures, and are at risk of disappearing from Bat Island, as has already occurred in so many other places. Sadly, there is currently no legal protection for these bats, but AITo has begun discussions with locals on ways to achieve long-term protection for Bat Island and all its inhabitants. *Stay tuned.*



Michael Heiner

Bat Island, locally known as *Pulau Empat* (Island #4), is reached by motorized canoe. The island is about a mile (1.5 km) from the mainland and < 25 acres.

a wingspan of up to 2 feet, roost in the island’s trees by day, then migrate every evening to the mainland, where they spend the night foraging for fruits in the native forests of Tompotika. To stand on Bat Island’s shores at dusk is to witness a truly awesome spectacle: slowly at first, and then in increasing numbers, a river of bats appears above your head, emanating from the low roost trees of Bat Island and then continuing in a flowing, flapping airborne stream to the mainland, whereupon it disappears as the bats disperse to forage. The bat-stream may continue for nearly an hour, as 10,000 bats or more fly overhead.

As the bats forage for fruits, they pollinate the trees as they go. Their guano is also high-quality fertilizer, and they are extremely effective seed dispersers--all of which make them indispensable to the long-term health of the forest ecosystem. So critical is their role, in fact, that without bats, the rainforest itself--Nature’s critical scaffolding not only in Tompotika,



Robin Moore

Every night, thousands of Sulawesi Flying Foxes migrate from their daytime roost on Bat Island to forage for food here in the foothills of Mt. Tompotika, where AITo is establishing a new rainforest preserve.



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

AITo is pleased to join with the United Nations and others worldwide in celebrating 2010 as the International Year of Biodiversity. As the UN states, “Biodiversity, the variety of life on Earth, is essential to sustaining the living networks and systems that provide us all with health, wealth, food, fuel, and the vital services our lives depend on. Human activity is causing the diversity of life on Earth to be lost. These losses are irreversible and impoverish us all, but we can prevent them. Now is the time to act.” Thank you for supporting AITo, and for all steps you take to safeguard biodiversity. You make a difference!

# AlTo's Conservation Awareness Campaign: Recruiting Nature Lovers for Tomorrow

AlTo's Indonesian staff--Anim, Ikhsan, Agus, Noval, Ipan, and Panji--came to us originally from a Tompotika college students' club called the *Pencinta Alam*, or "Nature Lovers." In the *Pencinta Alam* club, they enjoyed spending time outdoors, and anyone who has hiked with them will tell you of their legendary tarp-hanging or camp cooking skills! But lately, these bright, energetic young Tompotikans have gained critical skills not only for enjoying, but also for protecting nature: through AlTo they have been trained in basic ecology, conservation science, and wildlife management field skills such as how to take measurements

on a sea turtle, or navigate using a compass or GPS unit. Through AlTo, these Nature Lovers have become conservation professionals--and through AlTo's Awareness Campaign, they're out to recruit many more like themselves.

AlTo staff spend part of each month traveling around Tompotika's schools and villages holding interactive sessions to educate children and adults on conservation matters. Since the Awareness Campaign began in 2007, AlTo staff have held meetings at nearly all of Tompotika's 100+ primary, middle, and high schools, focusing to date on maleos, sea turtles, and Tompotika's endemic wildlife (upcoming topics include forests, litter, and more). Students learn, for example, that maleos need natural

forest corridors to travel from rainforest to nesting ground, or that sea turtles are protected by law, and they receive free posters, notebooks and other materials that help spread and reinforce the conservation message.

The program is hugely popular. AlTo staff have become role models for the youth of Tompotika, and schools regularly invite us back. As one Head of School commented, "I thank God that AlTo has come to our school so that the children can understand and care for our environment and rare wildlife."



Noval Suling

A Tompotikan sea turtle fan shows off her coloring sheet.



Titayanto Pieter

AlTo Staff Anim, Agus, and Noval (at rear) describe the nesting habits of sea turtles.



Scott Newell