

## **AITo Update, August 2009: Dancing with Butterflies**

**Dear Friend of AITo,**

**Welcome to the first monthly update from the Alliance for Tompotika Conservation (AITo), concerning our conservation work in Tompotika, Indonesia. These updates are intended to supplement our newsletters, which bring you more complete AITo news three times a year. If you prefer not to receive these e-mails, please let us know at: [tompotika@centurytel.net](mailto:tompotika@centurytel.net) .**



*Danaus chryssipus*, photo by Scott Newell

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If you have never done it before, what you might not realize about surveying for butterflies is how much *fun* it is, especially in Tompotika. Net resting on your shoulder, you creep through the tropical forest or along a shallow stream bed, eyes wide for any flutter that doesn't quite match the wind. It will appear in a flash of blue, or white, yellow, or black, and you must be on the ready to flail your net wildly right in front of you—or more often, high above your head or several yards away, whither you will make a mad dash and a heroic reach.

If you are an experienced butterfly catcher, you will have already mastered the whipping motion of your net arm and the flick of the wrist which twists the net to keep the captured butterfly from escaping; if not, you will flail and flick that much more. Either way, you will look very silly to those watching, especially bemused Tompotika villagers working in their nearby fields, for from

a distance you are flailing and flicking a long stick at nothing. But you will not care, because eventually, in your net, there in the leafy shade of the stream bank, you will reveal a fragile, precious treasure: a black-and-red *Papilio* swallowtail bigger than your palm; a huge but gossamer-thin white floating *Idea*; a lightning-fast darting metallic-blue *Elymnias*. You carry it out eagerly but gingerly to show the others, and a new butterfly is added to Tompotika's first-ever butterfly species list.

In August, eight AITo travelers returned from assisting Dr. Djunijanti Peggie, Indonesia's foremost lepidopterist, in the first-ever survey of the butterflies of Tompotika. Although the results of the survey are still being tabulated, over 50 species were identified in just a few short days, and the distinctive character of Tompotika's butterfly fauna—which in turn rests on Tompotika's distinctive vegetation, such as its giant milkweeds—is beginning to emerge. In addition, scores of Tompotikans are now paying attention to butterflies in a way that has never occurred before, and eight AITo eco-tourists had the time of their lives running around with nets! Meanwhile, baby sea turtles are hatching, the maleo bird nesting season is heating up, and Tompotika forests are beginning to get a reprieve from the rain.

Look for more AITo news, including information on next year's eco-service tour, in the September newsletter. And, please remember that AITo exists because of your support; if you have not donated recently, please do so today! Thank you for making it all possible.

Sincerely,  
Marcy Summers, AITo Director

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