

AITo Update April 2010: Salutory Stories from Tompotika

Come, Eat, and Hear Stories

If you are in the area of Vashon Island, Washington, USA, **please join us on Sunday, May 23, 3-5 pm for an afternoon of pictures and stories** of the latest news from Tompotika. What use is a maleo? How is organic farming helping preserve rainforest on Tompotika? Where do bats go when it's windy? What do folks in Tompotika have to teach Americans? We'll talk about this and much more at the gathering, which will be held at the home of Susan and Jim McColley (complete with Susan's fabulous refreshments!), **21419 86th Ave SW, Vashon Island**. Call AITo at 206-463-7720 for directions.

Meanwhile, here's one snippet. The last few weeks have been glad days for the maleo bird. **On March 24-26, AITo staff and partners traveled to Manado, North Sulawesi, for the First International Maleo Conference.**

The conference was organized and funded in large part by conservationists from the Netherlands, and pulled together about 75 people—just about everyone in the world who has anything to do with maleo conservation—to share lessons learned and make plans that will, it is hoped, reverse the decline of maleos all over, just as we have succeeded in doing in Tompotika. The conference was a great success, highlighted by the fact that **Taima village, AITo's partner and host to Tompotika's key maleo nesting ground, was awarded The Maleo Award for outstanding conservation achievement.** Stay tuned for more on that story later. But meanwhile, we'd like to share another tale of how maleo conservation is spreading and growing.



AITo staff and partners at the First International Maleo Conference (Pak Ilham is second from right)

We already know that our maleo work has made a big difference: **since AITo's conservation program started in 2006, the number of maleos coming every day to nest at the Taima nesting ground has tripled.** But what about elsewhere? And what difference does a conference make? One of the attendees at last month's conference was Pak Ilham, who is the KaDes (village head) of the



Maleo habitat in Teku village

village of Teku. Although we work closely with Teku village on our sea turtle program, Teku does not actually have an active maleo program, with AITo or anyone else, at present. After a season of maleo data-collection in Teku in 2008, budget and other considerations led us to limit our work with Teku to the turtles—even though there are four distinct locations within the village limits that each get a few nesting maleos. **Our hope in inviting Pak Ilham and a few of his government colleagues to the conference was that they might be inspired to take their own initiative to protect maleos,** especially because we know from our other

work with them that they have come to really support the notion of conservation generally. But there were no guarantees; and at present maleo eggs in Teku are still being poached (though huge progress has been made in protecting sea turtles).

So, we were keen to hear Ilham's feedback after he and the others had attended the conference.

When we met again the following week, the first thing he said was, "**The conference showed that**

the maleo is getting attention from the whole world. So we here in Indonesia really ought to be making serious efforts to protect it."

He went on to say that, during the conference, he and the other government officials had spent a lot of time discussing the fact that, although the law is clear on protecting maleos, in most places it's not enforced and people don't know about it. With the support of his government colleagues, he wants to make a specific declaration, mark out the boundaries of his village, and erect some signs: Maleos are a protected species! Within this area, no taking of maleo (or sea turtle!) eggs will be tolerated, and those who do it will be fined! **He and the others plan to pursue the issue of ensuring real enforcement of laws protecting maleos and other wildlife.** AITo can help with *sosialisasi* (public awareness), as by providing brochures, hosting informational meetings, etc. (we are already well known in this village and are well-positioned to help in this way).



AITo staff and partners during a break at the Maleo Conference. (Pak Ilham is at head of table)

Pak Ilham went on at some length about how **it is really time for people to start taking the law seriously and for it to be enforced with real penalties for violations.** At conference meals and during their homeward travel time,

Ilham and our other Tompotika partners came to this clear conclusion, and although the talk must be followed by action steps, we were really encouraged by Pak Ilham's words, which we heard echoed several times by others in that group. **This is a shift that will help maleos—more than that, it will help elevate the rule of law and civil society in general. Simply and deeply, it's a good thing.**

And, we were struck by how far we have come: a few years ago, Ilham had never given the slightest thought to maleo birds in his village; now here he was explaining with great energy how essential it is that maleo protection get serious. "**The maleo is a world treasure,**" he said. Certainly, at AITo we have worked hard to try to encourage that way of thinking. But now, with a 3-day conference in which his neighboring village of Taima received international recognition, Ilham is making his own plans to act on that notion. **This is what can happen when the world comes together.** Thanks for being part of it.

Marcy Summers
Director, Alliance for Tompotika Conservation (AITo)
21416 86th Ave SW
Vashon Is., WA 98070 USA

tel/fax: +1-206-463-7720
info@tompotika.org
www.tompotika.org

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