



Alliance for Tompotika Conservation Aliansi Konservasi Tompotika

NEWSLETTER

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Standing our Ground: Helping government move to avert a maleo disaster

This is how it should work: when an endangered, legally-protected species is threatened, communities and governments should act to safeguard it.

Unfortunately, it doesn't always happen that way. Recently, a man appeared claiming to own land adjacent to the protected maleo nesting ground in Taima, and he proceeded to begin clearing its forest. His ownership claim was uncertain; village officials doubted it, but at first did nothing to stop the clearing. So ALTO shifted into high gear, organizing meetings of village and higher government officials, explaining why intact forests are so critical for maleos, and urging prompt action to stop the deforestation.

And happily, persistence has paid off: last month, regional government issued a declaration that no clearing was allowed. The man ignored the instruction, but with further urging from ALTO, police actually arrived to enforce it! Better yet, village officials have now pledged to take a more active protective role. It goes to show: working together, we *can* protect maleos and other endangered wildlife. ~



Kevin Schafer

Maleos need healthy forests surrounding their nesting areas. Thanks to a group effort, and despite a close call, they still have that in Taima.

Climate Change in Tompotika: Fires, Floods, and Failed Crops

The year 2015 is shaping up to go down as one of Earth's hottest years since humans have been keeping records. The signs of that are all over the world, and Tompotika is no exception. But the varying effects of climate change have been evident for some time already in Tompotika. In the next few newsletters we'll take a look at some of these varying ways that climate change is manifesting in this biodiversity-rich corner of our planet: in the form of higher temperatures, drought, and *fires* in some years, increased rainfall and *floods* in others, and weather extremes leading to *failed crops* either way. For many living beings, human and non-, these are hard times.



Nicolas Van Ingen

Fires in the maleo corridor: Maleo birds have to cross these hills to travel between their non-breeding forest habitat and their communal nesting ground next to the beach. September forest fires destroyed much of the natural vegetation here, but a few of the larger trees survived.

Part One: Fires

In recent months, fires in Indonesia have made headlines around the world: huge swaths of once-forested lands burned; horrible smoke-clouds fouling the air even far beyond Indonesia's borders; untold numbers of people and wildlife displaced, injured, or killed by the devastation. There is blame to be laid: palm oil, logging, and other large industrial corporations, feeding their own profit motives and the world's consumptive appetites, have heedlessly and lawlessly caused a great deal of deliberate destruction. But this is only part of the story. In fact, both in the better-known areas of Borneo and Sumatra, and especially in Sulawesi, small-scale fires that were set deliberately or accidentally by local people and then burned out of control have been the main cause of the devastation.

That, against the backdrop of what may turn out *(continued on p. 2)*

Climate Change: Fires in Tompotika *(continued from p.1)*

Kevin Schafer



Green and misty. Tompotika's rainforest is usually moist and verdant, even during the "dry" months when this photo was taken.

They started several miles east of Taima village, where AITo's main maleo nesting ground is located. Rumors went around about who set them: naughty kids, a farmer who lost control of his crop burn, a disgruntled villager. It could have been any, or none, or all of these causes. But once loosed in the forest, there was no stopping these fires, particularly in a region where there is no such thing as a fire brigade, and they were allowed to burn essentially unimpeded. Fortunately, the fires traveled not as one large, unified front, but as multiple smaller spotfires, moving irregularly across the landscape. For the most part, the fires remained in the hilly, forested areas somewhat removed from villages and settlements,

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, creative, 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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to be the hottest El Niño on record--the periodic warming of Pacific currents that raises temperatures and disrupts weather patterns on both sides of the ocean.

People joke that in normal years in Tompotika, there are two seasons: wet, and a-little-less wet. After all, this is tropical rainforest country! Things are normally lush and green all year 'round. But this year, the strong El Niño brought drought, and by September, which would normally be just the start of the dryer season, the region had already gone three months with no rain at all. This is virtually unprecedented. Leaves turned brown and dropped off; soils desiccated and began to blow to dust; livestock and wildlife suffered for lack of water. It is not a drought-adapted system.

And then, in September, came fires.



Nicolas Van Ingen

September 2015: Spotfires destroyed vegetation through much, but not all, of the maleos' migration corridor. AITo teams battled to keep fires in check and vegetative cover intact in certain key areas.

such that villagers, though watchful, were generally not alarmed. But when the fires threatened the forested corridor that maleos use to travel back and forth between these hills and their beachside nesting ground, the AITo team and a few villagers went to work trying to subdue and redirect the fires away from the most critical areas. Within a week or so, the fires had moved on toward the west and the maleo corridor was out of immediate danger. But significant damage has been done, and it will take time before recovery begins and the fire's long-term effects are known.

As of this writing, there still has been no rain in the area. AITo staff have created some watering holes which maleos and other wildlife are utilizing heavily in the face of the ongoing drought. What is needed is rain. Still, when the rains come, lately they've been coming in excess; in the next newsletter, see the report on climate change's opposite effect: floods. ~



Kevin Schafer

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Do you like AITo's effective, creative style of conservation work? Want it to continue? It can't happen without your help. We come to you only

twice a year to ask your financial support; if you receive an appeal, please send in your gift. Or, donate online at www.tompotika.org/get-involved/donate

In Memoriam: Dr. Jack Barbash, Consummate Conservationist

On September 7, 2015, ALTo U.S. Board Vice-President Dr. Jack Barbash died at home, of cancer; with his passing, our Earth in general, and the ALTo family in particular, has lost one of its greatest and dearest friends.

Jack was a man of enormous energy and enthusiasm; when he entered the room, it was as if an extra light switch that you didn't know was there had suddenly been turned on. Jack was *bright* in every sense of that word; educated at Harvard, University of Waterloo, and Stanford, a sparkling but unpretentious intelligence pervaded everything he said and did. But he wasn't just smart--Jack was also unfailingly positive in his outlook. With a sunny attitude and a quick and wicked wit, Jack brought a welcome humor and dogged optimism to all his endeavors. He laughed deeply, often, and contagiously, and immersed himself fully in all that he did, to the delight and benefit of all those who had the privilege of accompanying him.

Jack lived what he loved, and science, music, and conservation were among his greatest passions. In his 24-year career as a USGS scientist, Jack's work on pesticides in groundwater made him an acknowledged expert. An accomplished musician, Jack played several instruments, including the piano, often with his eyes closed and his head tilted slightly back the better to listen. And for Jack, conservation wasn't just a set of ideas he espoused--Jack truly "walked the talk." While in graduate school, he became aware of the environmental costs of meat-eating, and was a vegetarian ever after; never taken in by glittery gadgets, he avoided all excess consumption and high-tech toys. He commuted by bike, he traveled by train. His was a deep understanding and deep commitment--he knew what made a difference, and lived accordingly.

Jack Barbash was one of the founding members of the ALTo alliance; his fingerprints are everywhere in this endeavor, from the scientific underpinnings of our sea turtle conservation program to our white paper on the dangers of nickel mining to our outreach efforts through Art for Conservation. Jack's departure leaves an unfillable hole, but his imbued presence among us will continue to shape and inspire us into the future.

In honor of Jack's legacy, a special Music for Conservation event is being planned as part of the next Tompotika Festival in October 2016. ~



Rayna Holtz

Share the good news. Jack was an irresistible and indefatigable evangelist for the things he cared about. Here, he shows Indonesian villagers what a mapped network of public protected areas can look like.



Titayanto Pieter

Kids' Books Project--Just in time for the holidays!

Your help is needed to establish a school library in one of ALTo's conservation partner villages



Noval Sullling

Schoolkids of Tanah Merah
These kids learn to read with school textbooks, but it ends there. They have no books at all to read for pleasure or learning, at home or at school.

Did you read for fun when you were a kid? *Where the Wild Things Are, The Lorax, Aesop's Fables?* It's no secret: reading helps build able, imaginative, inspired kids who do well in their lives and contribute to their communities. But what if you have no books?

Asked what his village most needs, *Pak Adolof Raja*, community leader and schoolteacher in Tanah Merah, one of ALTo's partner villages working on rainforest conservation, noted recently that children in Tanah Merah's primary school have no school library. Nothing to read at all beyond their school textbook primers. **You can change that.** For \$25 or \$40, you can put a book in the Tanah Merah library. It's the perfect holiday gift! ALTo staff are creating Indonesian translations of a selection of the very best children's books; for each book you sponsor, you'll receive a specially-designed card to give your loved one. See www.tompotika.org for details, or contact Sheila Eckman at sheila@tompotika.org.

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Vivi Tan Oga

Want to see tarsiers in the wild? This is your chance: make a contribution to science while having a ball! A few spaces remain for the Tompotika Tarsier Survey 25 Jan - 10 Feb 2016. Go to www.tompotika.org for details, or contact Sheila Eckman at sheila@tompotika.org.



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The Faces of ALTO: Dilawati Manjong, future ALTO staff member



Sheherazade

Dila is 13. She lives with her parents and two younger siblings; two more of her siblings live with relatives in another village. The house where Dila has grown up is less than a mile up the road from the maleo nesting ground near Taima village, Tompotika, where ALTO has been working since Dila was 4. Dila goes to school (6th grade) until noon every day but Sunday, and sometimes she helps harvest coconuts in her parents' plantation. Sometimes she and her younger brother also help out by selling the fish her father has caught; they walk the one street of her village neighborhood calling out "*Ikan! Ikan!*" (Fish!).

But when she's not busy with one of the above, Dila is most likely to be found at ALTO's camp Home Sweet Home, next to the maleo nesting ground. She loves to hang out with the staff ("they're so good-hearted!"), and help out with round-the-clock monitoring of maleos and sea turtles. "Anytime: morning, daytime, even nighttime," she says, "is great." Dila says she's very proud that she lives next door to the maleo nesting ground, and can see "Sulawesi's endemic maleo bird" so easily. At school, she says, mathematics is her favorite subject, but reading about nature is her hobby. Her school library has five or six books about nature, she says, and she has read them all. Dila's greatest hope for the future? She wants to become a member of ALTO's staff. "I like the work they do. ALTO's conservation program is really great. I hope it will grow and expand.... And I'm motivated by seeing these very cool ALTO staff." Why are ALTO's staff so cool? It's not primarily because they have cool shirts, and are good-looking (though that they are!) "It's because what they're doing is really cool. This isn't happening anywhere else." Dila is always keen to help out with our work, whether it's counting maleos, checking the time for data-recording, or patrolling the beaches for sea turtles.

Next year, to continue her schooling in middle school, Dila will have to travel to the next village 10 km away, but she's eager to do so. She's become something of an expert on the maleo amongst her friends. "Because they know I spend a lot of time here with ALTO, they'll ask me, 'What do maleos eat?' and things like that." Dila insists that her main hopes for the future all center on her career goal. "I just hope the maleo doesn't become extinct before I can become a member of ALTO's staff." ALTO is only too happy to be helping the maleo to recover so that that won't happen. But it's equally exciting to be helping to create and nurture young conservationists--with Dila and her like on the job, the maleos' future will be in good hands. ~