

## AITo Update, May 2018: Waging Peace for a Third Thing

It seems there are wars all around us these days. In Syria. Within the U. S. Federal government. Between the advocates of fossil fuels and the advocates of renewables. Even absent overt violence, it seems public discourse in the world these days does not run gentle. And we in the conservation community are not immune to this ungentleness.

Human-caused extinction, too, is a form of war. The AITo alliance was formed because local people in Tompotika, Indonesia, asked for help from the international community to prevent the extinction of their iconic, imperiled maleo bird. Realizing that business as usual in their community was trending ineluctably toward extirpation of this living symbol of their heritage, they invited a foreign conservation biologist who happened amongst them to work together with them to create something new-- a new "business as usual" that supported, rather than destroyed,

the continued existence of this marvelous bird. Working together, could we find a



**The Third Thing:** Athena, an injured wild maleo bird, helped inspire the newborn AITo alliance in 2006. Photo: Peter Dunwiddie

different path forward? Working together, could we create a new way of living in this village, on this planet, that did not end in the obliteration of one of its gentlest, most beautiful, and utterly unique citizens?

It has been a grand experiment, these last twelve years since AITo was formed in 2006. Since simple Tompotikan villagers invited this collaboration, look what it has yielded: rainforests not cut; sea turtles alive in the seas; bats flying healthy to maintain crops and forests; new protected areas established; tens of thousands of humans finding new love and knowledge of nature; a new corps of local conservation professionals trained; quality of life rising for local villagers and, yes: the marvelous maleo bird now recovering, with local populations double or triple what they were at the start.

Like most alliances, we have struggled at times. Values and perceptions differ between parties. Habits of thought, habits of action can be hard and slow to change, even when the will is there--let alone when, we being human, our wills flag. Even when backed by the noblest intentions, differences of culture and language can lead to misunderstandings and grievances. From time to time, within our alliance, we think: it is hard enough trying to fight for conservation Out There--but when we can't even agree In Here, is there any hope?



**Declining no more:** a typical day at AlTo's maleo nesting ground of late.  
Photo: Noval Suling

But the AlTo alliance is a partnership founded on an uncommon idea. It is not about one of us convincing the other to come around to "my" way of thinking. Nor is it about what I can do for you and you can do for me, you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours. Rather, it's about what we can do, you and I, *together*, on behalf of a third thing, a thing that is bigger than both of us, and yet includes us. Can we both set our own individual agendas aside long enough to listen for and prioritize the needs of the Third? Can we help

each other hear them? Can we grow our capacities for understanding, tolerance,

and forgiveness of one another as we muddle through this difficult work? Though we sometimes--inevitably--get it wrong, can we hang in there in the faith that the work of this Third Thing is helping us, increasingly, get it right, for ourselves, each other, and the Third?

The maleo, this Third Thing, cannot speak in human language. The maleo can only be what it is, need its simple needs, and hope that humans--so dominant on this planet these days--will notice and care. In the AlTo alliance, together we are finding a greater power than we had before--and a far greater joy--in serving this Third Thing.

▫ Congratulations! As an AlTo supporter, you are part of the alliance that has brought the maleo back from the brink of extinction in Tompotika. Because of you, this Third Thing is healthy, growing, and helping us humans learn to wage peace.

Right now, you can double your power to wage peace with a gift to AlTo. As part of the GiveBIG event, from now through midnight May 9, all donations up to USD \$7000 will be matched dollar for dollar.

[Click here](#) to give through Seattle Foundation's GiveBIG, or send your check to:

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Terima kasih! Thank you!

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