



Alliance for Tompotika Conservation Aliansi Konservasi Tompotika

NEWSLETTER

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How Are They Doing? Assessing maleos' status across their full range

ALTO is very proud of the fact that, through our conservation partnerships with local villagers, endangered maleos in Tompotika are increasing in number. Sadly, however, in the rest of this marvelous bird's range, which is restricted to Indonesia's island of Sulawesi, maleos are in decline. But just how steep of a decline, and where maleos still remain extant, has not been scientifically assessed for nearly 20 years. So, at the urging of experts from the IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature), the ALTO team has begun a collaborative effort to assess how maleos are doing across their entire range.

The task involves visiting virtually every active or potentially-active maleo nesting ground throughout the island of Sulawesi--a land area about half the size of Germany. Historically, this would have involved thousands of locations, but because maleos have already disappeared from most of their former



"I only got one egg today," says 70-year-old Pak Ahmad "Madu Manis" ("Sweet Honey") at a Central Sulawesi maleo site. Madu Manis has lived most of his life here, taking and selling maleo eggs. "I used to get hundreds." Though it's long been illegal, uncontrolled egg taking has caused maleo populations to plummet.

haunts, the list of sites to be checked is only around 100. In late 2017, the ALTO team started visiting them, one by one. Reach-
(continued on p. 2)

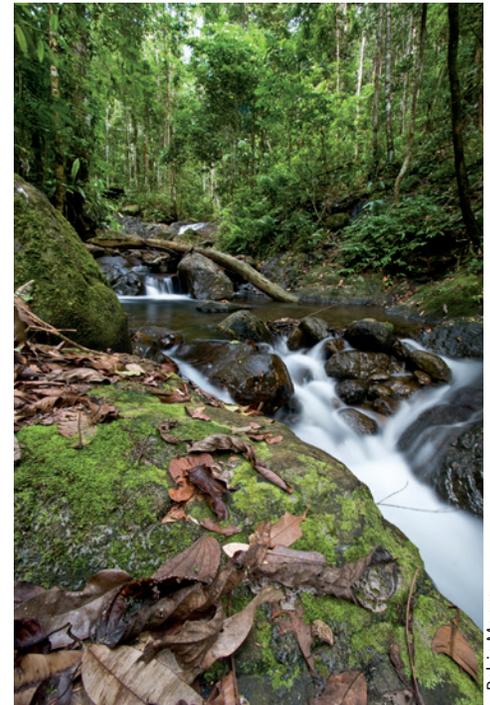
Protect and Restore: When damage is done, Nature gets help in healing

Whenever possible, it is always better to protect wild places and creatures, and prevent their destruction in the first place. ALTO invests a lot of time and energy into protecting nature through building support for it among local citizens, and some investment as well into promoting accountability, so that when laws are broken, appropriate consequences ensue. But sometimes, despite everyone's best efforts, bad things happen. Protected animals get killed by poachers. Giant rainforest trees get cut by illegal loggers--or even through logging permits that are legal but ill-advised. And then, what's to be done? Though Nature has a potent and reassuring ability to heal herself, there are often things humans can do to help speed the recovery process.

Last year, illegal loggers entered a Mt. Tompotika forest area protected by ALTO and the community of Sampaka, and began cutting trees. The loggers felled five large trees and began cutting them into boards, but



All hands on deck. 18 adults and teens from the nearby village came out to restore an area of forest locals call Athena's Place, after an injured maleo bird buried there.



There's so much at stake. Illegal logging took place just uphill to the left of this stream--essential habitat for wildlife and the main clean water source for villages downhill.

then, for reasons unknown, halted the process midway. Perhaps they were smitten with an attack of conscience, or a rumor of discovery. In any case, they left the scene a mess: trees felled but only partially
(continued on p. 3)

Robin Moore

Pandji Kresno

Novat Suling

Assessing maleos' status (continued from p.1)

ing the sites on foot, by boat, or by motorbike, the team seeks out knowledgeable locals as guides to a nesting ground's location and history. Early survey results? The situation is dire. To a person, locals describe how, in the '80's or '90's, maleos were numerous at these sites. But habitat loss and, above all, egg poaching have taken their toll, and now at most sites, few maleos remain, or none at all. Yet it's not too late: AIto has proven that



Agustian Laya

Diminishing returns. Shrinking numbers of maleos using the site have allowed vegetation to encroach on this nesting ground. Despite legal protections, especially in this park, "there's no regulation... people just take all the eggs," laments Sahar, a nearby resident. "Now the maleos are mostly gone."

maleo decline can be reversed. With this survey, the team hopes to identify the most promising sites *and* protectors, and help spark new protection efforts. ~

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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Kaumosongi Maleos - Protect and Restore

"This was **the** place for maleo eggs," says Pak Aswin Asamin, village head in Tompotika's Tower village, of the Kaumosongi maleo nesting ground a few decades ago. "The beach was black with maleos, and people would come every day in boats, or climb over the hills to get there and dig eggs." Like so many other maleo nesting grounds, Kaumosongi is now only a shadow of its former self--but it is not gone completely! A few years ago, in collaboration with villagers, AIto began protecting the nesting ground, preventing poaching of eggs and cutting of trees. Village leaders outlawed hunting with dogs in the vicinity, which

was disturbing maleos. All this was a good start, but in recent months the team has ramped up its efforts, widening the sandy spaces for maleos to lay eggs, installing fences



Sandhy Bawotong

to shield and protect birds as they lay, and monitoring closely to better understand maleos' travel habits to and from the nesting ground. In the long run, our goal is to fully protect and restore the "corridor"--or, the vegetated land that connects the nesting ground with native forest a few kilometers away--from its current somewhat fragmented, degraded state. At our Taima site, AIto has proven that with the proper care, maleo nesting grounds can recover. Now, we are out to spread that good news--and those best practices--all over Sulawesi. This is our vision: that Kaumosongi one day will be "black with maleos" once again. ~

A "living fence": the bare sticks in this photo will sprout and grow to create a barrier and a screen, shielding maleos from disturbance on the beach.

Sandhy Bawotong



Does it take their breath away, too? Maleos must climb to and cross over this ridge to reach the Kaumosongi nesting ground, which lies hidden behind the narrow stretch of beach visible in this photo.

Restoring the forest (continued from p.1)

Agustian Laya



The work of a chainsaw. After cutting the trees, loggers customarily mill them in place with their chainsaws. Here, the boards were simply abandoned.

to be done: the biggest trees just lying there uncut; empty spaces that ought to be replanted; a new course charted for this special place--who would take responsibility for all that?

In a testament to how the community values this place, and their partnership with AITo, the village took charge. A dozen men and a handful of teenagers--several of whom have benefited from the secondary-school scholarships AITo provides--came forward, and together with AITo staff, finished launching a new chapter at Athena's place. Litter and debris were cleaned up, felled logs were converted to resting seats, and, perhaps most importantly, new sapling trees of a variety of native species were planted all over. It will take some time and continuing care, but in a decade or two, the natural character of Athena's place will be better than ever. In conservation, setbacks are inevitable. But they're not necessarily permanent, and Nature can recover. With a little help, she can recover even stronger and faster. ~

cut up; boards left lying; brush everywhere; debris and litter all around. Village elders, and the AITo team, were devastated at the destruction. A most treasured site, this is the place where a maleo named Athena, who helped kick off AITo's first conservation work in 2006, came from and is buried.

With a little inquiry, village elders identified the perpetrators; two of the three men were locals. In the months following, discussions were held: how should the men be punished? The district police declined to get involved, so it fell to the villagers themselves, in communication with AITo, to determine the appropriate consequences. What followed was a form of "restorative justice"-- the men were required to relinquish all remaining lumber and donate it to those who'd lost homes in recent flooding. And Athena's Place must be cleaned up, replanted, and restored.

There was a problem: the perpetrators were so ashamed of what they'd done that they couldn't face the AITo team directly--so they did the first phase of the clean-up on their own. But afterwards, a good deal was left



Pandji Kresno

The new sign says it all: "Welcome...You have just entered Athena's Place Protected Forest. Let's guard the plants and animals here."

Restoring Tangkuladi Bat Island

Sandhy Bawotong



Loving them almost to death. The small dark spots in the upper branches of these trees are *Pteropus alecto*, the Black Flying Fox. These stressed trees will soon share their burden with the new plantings.

denuded, branches break, growth is hindered. So, together with villagers, AITo staff have begun a program of regular replanting and restoration on the island. The recent replanting of 31 new trees is just a start; key to the island's sustainability will be regular replantings and care of young trees. This feels great: as all part of one big, complex system, the interacting roles that bats, trees, and humans play are multifaceted. We all can, and must, help one another to survive and thrive. ~

Actually, it's a good problem to have. Since achieving full protection of Tangkuladi bat island in 2014, AITo and our government and villager partners have watched bat populations there swell. This is likely only partly due to an actual increase in the fruit bat or flying fox population--bats reproduce quite slowly--but it's as if "word has gotten out" among the region's bats, and more and more of them that used to roost elsewhere have taken to using Tangkuladi as their main base. It's the only safe haven anywhere in the region where bats are protected from hunting.

But, as good a thing as this is, thousands of large bats hanging on their branches all day is taking a toll on the island's trees: limbs are



Sandhy Bawotong

Bat guano makes the soil fertile. AITo staff Agus and Vivi plant a *ketapang* tree where it will grow quickly and support day-roosting fruit bats.



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The Faces of ALTO: Kevin Schafer, Photographer and U.S. Board V-P



Marty Hill

Internationally-known photographer Kevin Schafer celebrates nature with his art while working to conserve it on ALTO's U.S. Board.

Growing up in California, ALTO U.S. Board vice-president Kevin Schafer at first thought birding was boring. When Kevin's father, a professor at UCal Berkeley and an avid birder, tried to interest him in it, Kevin would have none of it. But he did love camping and being in nature, and once he'd left home, he started to notice birds. Kevin started writing letters to his dad to ask him about some of the birds he'd seen, and thus began an "enchanted" correspondence in which, through birds, Kevin and his father became close. Now decades later, Kevin is a renowned nature photographer, birder, and naturalist. From his base in Seattle, Washington, where he lives with his wife Marty Hill--also a distinguished conservationist--Kevin has explored almost every corner of the globe, from Antarctica to the Amazon to the Pribilof Islands, observing--and photographing--birds and myriad other wild creatures. His work has been featured in National Geographic, Smithsonian, Natural History, Audubon, and other top publications, and he's authored several books for both adults and children.

Kevin's introduction to ALTO was through visiting Tompotika in 2011, as part of a "Tri-pods in the Mud" photographic expedition. Seeing ALTO's work in Indonesia "inspired me deeply." On returning home, he accepted an invitation to join the ALTO Board. Up until then, though he'd traveled the world documenting nature and wildlife, "my engagement with conservation was always brief and somewhat superficial," Kevin says. Serving on ALTO's Board, he says he's learned a lot about the "realities of conservation on the ground, the variables that confront it... how difficult it can be." Kevin's previous experience with conservation on small islands, such as South Georgia and Ascension Islands, led him to appreciate small, focused projects. "Smaller is better." He appreciates ALTO's "long and deep" approach to conservation. "Other organizations change their campaign every two years. ALTO has taken one place and invested deeply in it."

ALTO is a "very collaborative effort;" in contrast to the relative solitude of photography, with ALTO, Kevin has enjoyed being part of a team. In today's world, conservation can be hard going. "There are days when I despair... when I think what we're doing is too little, too late... We have to learn limits to our control and ownership of Earth." But when he was campaigning against the Vietnam war, Kevin says, "I learned that a few people can have a huge impact." Now, Kevin draws hope from hard work and careful allocation of his efforts. "I see projects that I believe in, and ALTO is one of them."~