



Alliance for Tompotika Conservation Aliansi Konservasi Tompotika

NEWSLETTER

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Securing the Land

Government action formalizes maleo habitat protection



Noval Sullling

In order to survive and thrive, maleos need three things: a safe place to lay their eggs, sufficient native Sulawesi forest to live in when they're not laying, and a navigable corridor to get back and forth between them. While poaching of eggs by humans appears to be the most acute threat to maleo populations, safeguarding their forest habitat--and making sure it's connected to their nesting grounds--are also essential pieces of the puzzle.

Tompotika's maleo recovery has included all three. While working with villagers to end poaching (see companion article), over the last twelve years ALTO has also worked hard to safeguard critical maleo habitat. The regional and national governments responded, in 2014 declaring ALTO's maleo area an "Essential Ecosystem"--that is, an area critical for conservation that is outside the existing park system. This provides the official underpinnings to ensure *(continued on p. 2)*

The Great Maleo Comeback: What does it look like when an endangered species recovers?

When a small group of Indonesian and international conservationists came together at the request of local villagers back in August of 2006 to help call a temporary moratorium on the illegal harvest of the eggs of the endangered maleo bird, *Macrocephalon maleo*, no one knew where the effort would lead. It was a new partnership, the parties didn't know one another well, and everything, including the birds themselves--what few birds were left after long years of overexploitation--seemed tentative and vulnerable. But the parties had forged an agreement, the program was launched in good faith, and all hoped for the best. It was to be a six-month trial.

That was twelve years ago, and the enterprise has never looked back. What began as an experiment has turned out to be a long-term collaboration between ALTO, the local village of Taima, and the regional government, facilitating the most successful recovery the maleo has ever seen. Simply by villagers voluntarily ending their practice of illegal egg-poaching, the maleo population is now steadily and solidly coming back. This is fantastic news--it's what we hope for for every endangered species, but rarely get to witness. So, twelve years on, what does that recovery look like?

First of all, the recovery is about *numbers*. Where before 2006 the number of maleos that might be seen at one time on the nesting ground peaked at a maximum of 12 or 16 at most, one day a few weeks ago ALTO staff counted a record **72 birds at once**. Overall throughout the year, visits by adult maleos to lay eggs at the nesting ground have **increased by 109%**.

The recovery is also about *behavior*--maleos reclaiming their native breeding "culture." Before the recovery, when under constant poaching pressure, the few birds that came to nest traveled in and *(continued on p. 3)*

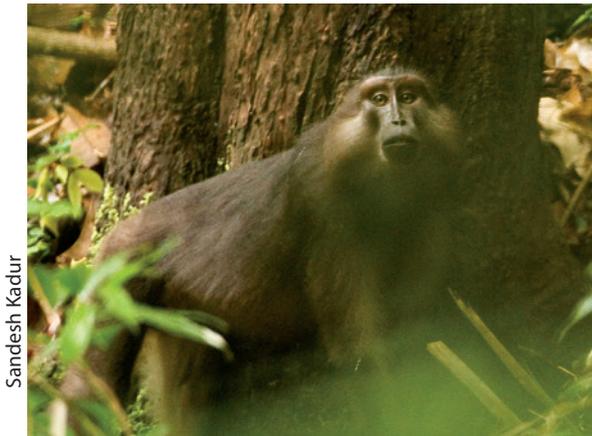


Noval Sullling

Interacting once more. Each maleo pair chooses its own patch of sand upon which to dig a nesting pit. As the digging proceeds, the pairs move around, squabble, and usurp each other's nest pits multiple times before laying their one precious egg.

Protecting habitat (continued from p.1)

that this critical maleo habitat is permanently protected. But a declaration is not enough, so AITo staff and villagers patrol the protected forest and corridor area regularly to prevent poaching (usually by snares), logging, or encroachment. In twelve years, AITo has helped facilitate the naming of three new government-protected areas, and management of a fourth. Healthy forests benefit all, including humans, providing clean air and water, climate stabilization, flood control, and much more. ~



Sandesh Kadur

Comrades in the forest. Like the maleo, this Sulawesi macaque is endangered by loss of his forest habitat and persecution by humans. AITo's work to protect habitat, raise conservation awareness, and enforce wildlife laws benefits myriad wildlife species like him.

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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New Faces at AITo: Sukendra Mahalaya

"We have the best job on earth!" says AITo's new full-time Senior Manager for Operations, Dr. Sukendra Mahalaya, PhD. Sukendra is based in Tompotika's gateway city, Luwuk, where he has joined the AITo team to help manage our in-country staff and programs, and make sure that all operations run smoothly.

Sukendra, or "Ken," loves Luwuk, a small city with a "million-dollar view." "I don't like the crowd of a big city-I'm a country boy," he says. Born in a rural area of Java, Ken's mother died when he was young, and he was raised primarily by his grandmother. Very able in school, he won an opportunity through a Suharto-era scholarship program to attend Indonesia's premier agricultural college, IPB, in Bogor, West Java. "For me it was a wonderful thing. It opened the door to education." After college, he landed an international development job in Papua, eastern Indonesia, doing outreach to village farmers. Thirteen years helping Papuan farmers improve their pig husbandry and sweet potato farming then led to a scholarship for a PhD in Natural Resources Management at University of Adelaide, Australia. He speaks fluent English.



Sandhy Bawotong

Senior Manager for Operations, Dr. Sukendra Mahalaya, in front of AITo's Luwuk office. "We need to be eager to learn new things," Ken says of his new job in conservation.

In Papua and beyond, Ken came to value working in international teams. "Co-operation is very important," he says, "we need the consultation." Like AITo staff, Ken values listening, and his skills and efficiency come with a cheerful manner and down-to-earth, easy-going temperament that help him get along easily with people from all different backgrounds and walks of life.

Ken, 53, has two adult sons. But when the recent death of his wife left Ken alone, he decided to seek a new life and a new start. Though new to conservation, AITo's approach impressed him. "I could see that AITo really cares about young Indonesians. Not so many experts in Indonesia really have time to take care about the next generation. And the few that do may not have the expertise.... I like having a young team. I want to help them be someone someday. Bravo, AITo. Let's work together." ~

Maleo Recovery (continued from p.1)

out quickly. Egg-laying was a furtive, business-like affair; maleos didn't linger, they encountered few other maleos, and they interacted little. Now, however, egg-laying is a drawn-out and very social activity. Our recent research with banded birds has revealed that a maleo pair may spend up to three days at the nesting ground, excavating for, laying, and burying their one egg. Throughout the process they will chase, squawk, and squabble with other maleos--particularly the males. This range of maleo social behaviors has only re-surfaced since the recovery, but we've also learned that given a choice, maleos prefer to nest in one another's company, rather than alone in pairs--their normal "culture" appears to be collective.

The maleo recovery in Tompotika is also about humans, and **changed human hearts and minds**. Before the partnership began, villagers in nearby Taima village tightly controlled access to the maleo nesting ground--but did not think about the birds themselves much beyond their value as egg producers (and in fact, virtually every egg was taken). Now that has changed, and our villager partners--indeed, citizens throughout the region--enjoy observing, celebrating, and taking pride in this iconic bird which is now recovering under their care. As Taima village leader Adrianto Panigoro put it, "Before AITo, people didn't understand con-

servation. But now they feel a sense of ownership. They're proud of the maleo, and the community is happy with the harmony that's been created."

Finally, the maleo recovery is about **changed human behavior**. In this recovery, no elaborate facilities, physical structures, or schemes were necessary--all that was needed was for people to come together in a collective commitment to end poaching. When we human beings chose simply to restrain our consumption, Nature took care of the rest.

Maintaining these commitments has required hard work. But what we humans have created in the last 12 years is truly a win-win: local villagers, government, the international community, and especially the maleos all are now better off. Recovery for the maleo has meant a better quality of life, and that more abundantly, for **everyone**--both human and non-human alike. ~



Sandhy Bawotong

The pride of Tompotika. This maleo statue was created in Luwuk recently to commemorate a popular bicycle race.



Kevin Schafer

Natural predators are not a problem. Adult maleos largely ignore monitor lizards. The lizards do occasionally "get lucky" and find an egg, but this has not interfered with the maleos' dramatic recovery.

New Faces at AITo: Virginia James

"I'm so excited to work for an organization that tries to do good work in various fields," says AITo's new Communications and Outreach Coordinator, Virginia James, based at AITo's US office on Vashon Island, Washington, USA. Replacing Sheila Eckman, who retired earlier this year, Virginia joins the AITo team part-time to assist with administration, communication to



Travis Whitehead

"I like being part of a supportive team," says **Virginia James, AITo's new Communications and Outreach Coordinator**, "with real people working for the good of the world."

donors and partners, and the wide variety of other tasks that keep the staff of small organizations on their toes.

Virginia, 34, grew up near the Black Hills of South Dakota, where being able to connect daily with nature made a big difference to her. Medical and other challenges her family experienced as a kid helped shape her keen sensitivity to others: "I try to be understanding of other people. If you're not angry at the world, it makes you compassionate." With degrees in history and social work, Virginia has put that compassion to work in a variety of "help people jobs."

Earlier this year, Virginia and her fiancé Travis relocated from South Dakota to the Pacific Northwest, where they sought closeness to nature, a more community-oriented lifestyle, and greater support for their values. Though new to conservation, Virginia is excited about working for AITo: "I want to work for people with soul." "I keep learning about AITo's holistic approach to bettering the lives of animals, the forest, and the people who live there." In her work as a social worker, Virginia says, she learned that "you can't force people to change. But when you're truly doing good work, you help good things happen, not make things happen." ~



Virginia's also a talented artist. She loves it that AITo saves sea turtles!



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Measuring Success: How effective are ALTO's Outreach efforts?

Conservation organizations often talk about “educating the public,” “raising awareness,” “strengthening political will,” and “building public support”--and how essential these outreach goals are for the long-term success of conservation efforts. After all, given that most conservation challenges are driven by destructive human attitudes and activities, reaching people to try to inspire changes in both actions and attitudes is essential. But here's the rub: though efforts at outreach--*sosialisasi* is the Indonesian word--are commonly undertaken, it is notoriously difficult to measure their effectiveness. We're seeing positive results with species in the field, our outreach efforts are well-received, and we have plenty of anecdotes of people who seem supportive and happy with their newfound awareness. But how can we tell if, overall, people's hearts and minds are truly being changed? And further, how can we determine which outreach techniques are the most effective?

With a view to finding out, ALTO turns to the social sciences. Using approaches that are appropriate to Tompotika village culture and techniques informed by psychological research, ALTO has been investigating how people *really* think about conservation--and not just what they think is most polite to say. In recent months, ALTO staff have interviewed hundreds of men, women, and children, hunters and non-hunters, old and young, in villages that have and have not received recent ALTO conservation outreach programs.

The results are still being tabulated. But already we've learned a great deal about how villagers think, what words carry what meanings in their minds, and how we can use that to advance conservation. For instance, adults tend to be quite concerned about “illegal logging,” (they prefer the English phrase over the Indonesian equivalent), especially in villages where ALTO has done some outreach. Kids tend to care about animals, and are upset by the idea of extinction. And, whatever their opinions, villagers enjoy ALTO's outreach events. “Please come back and do more,” is a common refrain. We will. And we'll report results. Stay tuned. ~



Marvati Abiduna

ALTO staff and Outreach Team member Ipan Djano interviews a village woman about her views.