

AIto Update, Dec 2020:

Happy Holidays and thank you! You are already helping to prevent the next pandemic!

Happy Holidays from the Alliance for Tompotika Conservation (AIto) team! We wish everyone around the world a healthy holiday season, and extend a big *thank you/terima kasih* to AIto supporters: you have already helped to prevent the next pandemic.

How is that? First of all, your support has enabled AIto to protect Tangkuladi Island, a critical



Every night, the bats fly to the mainland, where they "kiss" the trees to pollinate them. Illustration: Ipan Djano.

natural roosting spot for tens of thousands of fruit bats, and to end hunting there. The Covid-19 virus is thought to have originated among bats, and then to have spread when infected bats were hunted, brought to a bushmeat market, and commingled with other wildlife. Stressful, unsanitary conditions at the market facilitated the virus in jumping to an intermediate host (possibly the pangolin), and thence to humans. Covid-19 did not originate in Indonesia, but your protection of Tangkuladi prevents a similar pandemic from doing so.

Secondly, your support has allowed AIto to use this "teachable moment" to help raise awareness in Tompotika about the importance of conserving bats and their forests, and to instill pride in those who have pursued it. The AIto team has recently produced a children's book in Indonesian called *The Bat, The Virus, and the Forest (Kelelawar, Virus, dan Hutan)*, which explains one of the many connections between nature conservation and human health, bringing to life the essential role bats play in maintaining vital tropical forests, and the deadly chain of consequences that can follow when they are not protected.

In the story, a village boy named Atu asks his mother why it is that he and all his friends are stuck at home with no school and everything shut down--just like kids all over Tompotika, where no computers or internet means there aren't even any on-line activities. In answer, Atu's mother tells a story about a bat family, and how every night the family and their bat neighbors fly to the forest and "kiss the trees"--that is, in sipping nectar from flowering tree-blossoms, they perform the essential service of pollination that enables production of fruits and the long-term maintenance of those tropical forests that are so critical for life on earth. But when a

group of hunters captures some of the family and sells them for bushmeat at a distant market, a deadly virus is released.

Everyone in the world can supply lived details to the devastating story of the havoc the virus has wreaked among humans. But the book closes on a positive note, with Atu's mother reminding him that in their village, they can be doubly proud, because a few years back they chose to protect their bats. No pandemic will arise from their home place, and now at night Atu goes out just to watch their bats kiss the trees.



The book is illustrated by AITo Conservation Officer and Artist-in-Residence Ipan Djano and the

layout and last details are just now being finalized. We hope to print at least 3000 copies of the book and distribute them in Tompotika in the weeks ahead, while kids are still stuck at home due to Covid-19. We plan to focus especially in areas where commercial bat hunting is still taking place.

Atu wonders: what is the connection between bats, forests, and the Covid-19 pandemic? Illustration: Ipan Djano.

That's where you have a third opportunity to help prevent the next pandemic. Tangkuladi island is now protected as a model, and *Kelelawar, Virus, dan Hutan* has now been written, but your help is needed so that AITo can raise the necessary funds to print (on 100% recycled paper) and distribute this story. It's a little book, but a powerful message, and we need your help to spread that message in the places where it can have a big impact on bats, forests, and human health going forward.

Please make a special donation to help print the book and prevent the next pandemic.

From all of us in the AITo team, thank you for already making a difference--yours is a gift to the whole world.

Terima kasih, and Happy Holidays!



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