



# Alliance for Tompotika Conservation Aliansi Konservasi Tompotika

NEWSLETTER

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## **We Speak for the Trees:** First case of illegal logging prosecuted in the region

The problem has happened before, but this time, the outcome is different. On February 2, 2021, ALTo's villager partner Yudil was doing his normal patrol of the protected forest corridor that connects ALTo's Taima maleo nesting ground with interior forestland. Hearing a chainsaw, he and ALTo staff member Vivi investigated, and came upon a young man cutting trees—including a huge landmark tree used by maleos and many other species in the forest corridor. Yudil confiscated the chainsaw and the team quickly discovered that the young man was acting on behalf (continued on p. 2)



**Caught red-handed.** ALTo staff member Vivi (L) and villager partner Yudil (R) caught the illegal logger with the chainsaw in his hands. Tragically, however, this giant forest elder was already felled. This tree will be greatly missed.

## **The Bat Book** The origins of the pandemic explained

Every one of us feels the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic—but do you know how it began? ALTo has produced a new short book, *The Bat, the Virus, and the Forest*, to tell the story in Bahasa Indonesia and English.

Tompotika is a kind of "ground zero" for this issue: if it weren't for protective actions taken in 2014, the Covid-19 pandemic could easily have originated on Tompotika's very own Tangkuladi Island. But in that year, villagers worked with ALTo to end bat hunting and protect the island as a nature reserve. In so doing, they not only safeguarded the largest bat roost site in the region, but they prevented any future pandemics from originating there. Sadly, though, there is more work to do: commercial bat hunting and bushmeat markets remain active in other parts of the region.



Adrianus Bawotong

"Thank you for these books. The kids are asking so many questions about bats and the Corona virus now," said one primary school teacher in Tompotika.



Ipan Djano

**"Kissing" the trees.** Bats play a crucial role in maintaining tropical forests. When bats "kiss" flowers to drink nectar, they pollinate the tree so that it can bear fruit.

What does bat hunting have to do with the Covid-19 pandemic? Researchers believe that the Corona virus was present in healthy bats that were hunted and brought to a bushmeat market, where the virus "jumped"—probably by way of another species—to the humans nearby. To prevent future pandemics, then, we must leave bats and other wildlife in the natural habitats where they belong—and where they keep forests and other natural ecosystems healthy. As the book explains, bats are essential for sustaining tropical forests through pollination, seed dispersal, and fertilization. And forests in turn are essential (continued on p. 3)

## Illegal logging prosecution (continued from p.1)

of a local woman who had hired him to cut and mill trees to get quick cash. The local authorities were called, but initially, the Boss Lady and her employee were let off with a warning and told to go home to their neighboring village.

That's where the story departs from the usual. AITo staff requested further discussions with police and leaders from both villages, and on Feb 25th a Covid-adapted meeting was called. AITo staff gave a presentation about the importance of forests for humans and wildlife, and reviewed relevant law. Then the Head of the district police, Muhammad Zulfikar, took the reins. *Kapolsek* Zulfikar, who had risen up the police ranks in the region to become local Head, also happened to have attended a recent training in which he learned that certain Indonesian laws, when violated, *must* be sent for a court trial—and the natural resource law in question here was one of them.



*Illegal logging is a real crime.* AITo staff were delighted when police and village authorities decided to escalate the case, which is now awaiting trial in Luwuk.

Village leaders *could not* let the Boss Lady off with just a warning, and *must* escalate the case to the courts in the nearby city of Luwuk. The following week, the Boss Lady and chainsaw operator were summoned to appear in Luwuk, a 4-hour motorbike ride away.

The case will require some months of preparation before trial, but in that time, the two accused will be required to make frequent journeys to Luwuk—in itself a major burden. And meanwhile, the case is all the talk about town, with public opinion solidly in favor of punishment. "They stole from everybody," people are saying. For the first time ever in this region, a crime against nature is going to court. ~



Courtesy photo

*A good policeman is a marvelous thing.* Muhammad Zulfikar urged village leaders to refer the case for prosecution in the courts. "Don't feel sorry for her," he said of the illegal logger boss.

The Alliance for Tompotika Conservation/ Aliansi Konservasi Tompotika ("AL-TO") is committed to helping all of nature, including people, thrive. Our work is centered in Sulawesi, Indonesia — one of Earth's most unique biological treasure-houses. At the invitation of local communities, AITo forges partnerships to protect and restore imperiled species, tropical rainforests, and other natural ecosystems while supporting the dignity and self-sufficiency of local communities in a changing world.

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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Ipan Djano

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## Who is Athena and what is her Circle?

In July, 2006, as a new Alliance prepared to launch the first community-based maleo conservation project, an injured maleo called Athena fell into their hands. Though straight from the wild, Athena was calm, beautiful, and friendly, and children and adults throughout the region flocked to see her and join the new conservation effort. After the project was launched, Athena's injuries overcame her, and she was buried on Mt. Tompotika where she had lived. Local people promptly named the spot "Athena's Place," and have protected it ever since.



Steve Caldwell

*2006: Athena the maleo was the perfect ambassador for the new conservation partnership.* Now AITo's core supporters enable huge strides for conservation in her name.

Now Athena's legacy is carried forward by folks who've made a major commitment to what Athena represented: successful community-based conservation that benefits all—humans and non-human nature together. If you're able, your gift of \$500 or more will make you, too, a member of Athena's Circle, and a hero of conservation giving. It's caring with your sleeves rolled up. Join us!~



## The Bat Book *(continued from p.1)*

to local people and all life on planet Earth. To stay healthy ourselves, we all—plants, humans, and other animals—have to keep *one another* healthy.

*The Bat, the Virus, and the Forest* or *Kelelawar, Virus, dan Hutan* is a 16-page book written and richly illustrated in-house by AITo staff, available in English and Indonesian, aimed at ages 8 and up, and printed on 100% pcw recycled paper. The

***The Bat, the Virus, and the Forest***  
**is available by donation at [www.tompotika.org](http://www.tompotika.org).**  
**Your donation for the Bat Book supports**  
**its free distribution in Indonesia.**

book aims to raise awareness about the dangers of bat hunting and bushmeat markets—which have given rise not only to Covid-19 but also to SARS and other deadly zoonotic diseases—but also to highlight the great work of Tompotikans who, in 2014, *prevented* such disasters by ending hunting and protecting their forests.

The book traces the full story, including the realities of bat-hunting and bushmeat markets as they are in Indonesia today, without sugar-coating. Though people get used to these practices as business-as-usual in their cultural context, witnessing the entire chain of events can be upsetting. Upon reading the book, Noah (11, Indonesia) became angry and incredulous. "How could we be letting this happen?"



Ipan Djano

**Deadly human practices.** The book follows a healthy flying fox, Chiro, who is captured by hunters and trucked to a distant bushmeat market for sale. In the stress, dirt, and crowding of the market, the virus latent in Chiro's body has the chance to "wake up" and infect others, leading to pandemic.

Gemma's (10, USA) reaction was quiet: "So... *we did* this ourselves."

Bryony (35, USA), found the book "very moving. VERY MOVING." Ruth (50, USA) said, "I LOVE the book! It is profound and sad and real and it makes me wish more children's books were written like this one! IMHO children should not be so protected that they don't learn the truth about wildlife issues. When I was around 6, I read a book from the viewpoint of the ants in a colony and how dedicated and brave they are, only to be destroyed by humans. It set me on my life's path."

The goal is to distribute the book as widely as possible, and to change hearts. Help is coming from many quarters. The Head of Tompotika's Bualemo District, which includes several active bat roost sites, said, "I am making this compulsory reading for all District staff." And Ica, (6), said, "I will never eat bat meat all my life. And I'll always remember [bat characters]Poni, Fila, and Chiro." ~



Adrianus Bawotong

**Hands off my bats.** The owner of a large bat roost tree, after receiving copies of the book, said, "This is a good book. I'm going to give it to bat hunters who come to the tree in front. They must read it." Later, his daughter added: "Now I see why Papa was so angry a few days ago at the bat hunters who came to the banyan tree!"

### Got more stock than you need? Give it to AITo.

Want to put your stocks to work for conservation? AITo is now set up to receive gifts of appreciated securities. Contact galen@tompotika.org for more info.



Sandesh Kadur

### GiveBig is on now!

*Now through May 5, your donation to AITo will be doubled (up to \$5000).*

Make your gift at the GiveBig website, [www.givebigwa.org](http://www.givebigwa.org) (search for "alto"), at AITo's website, [www.tompotika.org](http://www.tompotika.org), or send a check. Thank you! All gifts will be matched up to 5K.



AITo is proud to be taking part in the United Nations' Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, 2021-2030. Hope for our collective future rests in protecting and restoring the natural species and systems in which all life on Earth abides.



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## The Faces of ALTO: Galen Priest, Senior Science Advisor and Outreach Specialist



Courtesy photo

Dr. Galen Priest knows more than just about anyone on the planet about the relationships between wood-boring beetles and arboreal ants in the Brazilian Cerrado. But now he's applying his lifelong curiosity, keen observation skills, and deep desire to make a difference to conservation in Sulawesi, as ALTO's new full-time Senior Science Advisor and Outreach Specialist.

Galen grew up in Boulder, Colorado, one of four children. As a child, he spent a great deal of time outdoors, and always had lots of questions about his natural surroundings. In high school, college, and then pursuing his PhD at the University of Missouri in St. Louis, he took all the biology classes he could—this, he knew, was what he wanted to do with his life. Galen's PhD research took him to Brazil, where he collaborated with researchers at the Federal University of Uberlândia, and met the woman who became his wife, fellow plant researcher Lorryna Guedes Pereira, or "Lolo" for short.

But the more Galen learned about the biology of the natural world, the more he felt drawn to on-the-ground conservation. "As I was taking an academic approach to biology, I realized that the end goal of a lot of it was conservation. I wanted to get as close to that as possible. I wanted to have a positive impact on the natural environment that I enjoy so much and enjoy sharing with others." Galen completed his PhD in 2018, and joining family and friends in the area, moved to Vashon Island, Washington, where ALTO has its U.S. base. In his new position with ALTO, Galen will be helping to ensure strong scientific foundations for our field projects in Indonesia, and will also be working to expand the ALTO network outside of Indonesia. Galen's capable versatility and easy-going, willing attitude make him a great fit for ALTO's small team. He's also an artist (hand engraving) and musician (Highland bagpipes), so he appreciates the value ALTO places on the Arts.

Of his early impressions of ALTO, Galen says, "I'm amazed that for the relatively small number of people involved, the magnitude of the impact it can have... I hope I can live up to that magnitude!" When the Covid-19 pandemic allows, Galen looks forward to meeting our staff and partners, and seeing our field projects in Sulawesi. Already, he's been "struck by how much wisdom and foresight" our villager partners seem to have about conservation, and the "degree to which they want to participate." Galen smiles. "This is a dream job for me. I'm extra excited to be here." *Welcome, Galen!* ~