



Alliance for Tompotika Conservation Aliansi Konservasi Tompotika

NEWSLETTER

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COVID-19: Community-based means COVID-resilient conservation

Around the world, families and communities are adjusting to life with COVID-19, and no one—whether or not they become ill—is unaffected. The practical and economic effects of the pandemic have been profound, and many conservation projects, especially those that rely on income from tourism, have suffered greatly.

But the ALTo team—and the wildlife and natural areas we protect—are lucky. Being firmly rooted in the communities closest to our sites, we don't rely significantly on travel, trade, or tourism to get our work done. That's the beauty of being "community-based": *(continued on p. 4)*



Despite COVID-19, life goes on. ALTo Conservation Officer Ahmad Nur and his bride, Setiawati Singgano, pose for a wedding photo in front of the area Ministry of Religion office, where the two solemnified their union. Though their large celebration had to be canceled, this Covid-era wedding was traditional, intimate, and not a whit less joyful.

Courtesy photo

Partnership: ALTo's collaborative approach is key to conservation success



August 1, 2006. A new Alliance of villagers, international partners, and conservation professionals erect a hand-made sign announcing local protection of the maleo bird. Fourteen years later, maleo numbers have quadrupled, and the Alliance has grown wide, deep, and strong.

"If you will help us," said villagers of Taima, a small coastal village on the Tompotika peninsula of Sulawesi, Indonesia, "then let's just stop egg-taking entirely." It was 2006, and several months earlier, on a visit to their village, American conservation biologist Marcy Summers had spoken with villagers about the communal nesting ground of the maleo bird (*Macrocephalon maleo*) within their village. The rare and unique maleo, she said, had already disappeared from most of its former range, and if villagers in Taima continued to take virtually every egg as they were doing now, the maleos here, too, were sure to disappear. Was that what villagers wanted? "No, *Ibu*, that is not what we want," they said, "but we are perplexed as to how to prevent it. Will you help us set up a conservation program?" Thus the Alliance for Tompotika Conservation / Aliansi Konservasi Tompotika, or just "Al-To" was born.

"One touch of nature makes the whole world kin."

- WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

From Day One, all of ALTo's work has been the product of consultation, participation, and collaboration between people of many different backgrounds, customs, and values, coming together on behalf *(continued on p. 5)*

Join AITo for a free webinar November 17-19

Using the Flagship to Turn the Fleet: The Maleo and New Directions for Conservation in Indonesia



Why is the maleo ranked as the world's 19th most critically-important bird for conservation? Why do maleo chicks hatch deep underground? How can AITo's success in recovering the maleo help shape the future for conservation of many other unique and endangered species?

In this free online webinar, AITo Director and maleo expert Marcy Summers will talk about the past, present, and future of this iconic species, and how AITo is using the maleo to shape a new relationship between people and nature.

| Webinar Schedule | Western US & Canada (UTC -8) | Eastern US & Canada (UTC -5) | UK (UTC) | Western Europe (UTC +1) | Indonesia (UTC +7/8) | Eastern Australia (UTC +11) |
|------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Webinar #1 | Tues, Nov 17 10:30 am | Tues, Nov 17 1:30 pm | Tues, Nov 17 6:30 pm | Tues, Nov 17 7:30 pm | Weds, Nov 18 1:30/2:30 am | Weds, Nov 18 5:30 am |
| Webinar #2 | Weds, Nov 18 5:00 pm | Weds, Nov 18 8:00 pm | Thurs, Nov 19 1:00 am | Thurs, Nov 19 2:00 am | Thurs, Nov 19 8:00/9:00 am | Thurs, Nov 19 noon |

This one-hour webinar will be held twice, and registration for this live event will be limited. Please keep an eye out for a registration email. Or to register now, type in the web address for your preferred date.

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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Web 1 registration link:

https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_KqLaQ3U4QxG2w358Ibn3w

Web 2 registration link:

https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_3lJ5kzslRYCio_7HoIhazA



Tugan the Watch-Rooster says, Fear Not!

The year 2020 will soon be over. (Phew.)

Shortly, in your mailbox you will receive AITo's annual year-end appeal letter, asking for your support. Please send in your donation, or give online. All the work you read about here is possible only thanks to your caring and generosity. No plush toys. No address labels. Just a simple, sincere request: Please help make this work happen. Terima kasih ~ Thank you!

Portrait of a Partner: Yudil Dilao, Hunter-turned-Guardian



A decade ago, one would never have imagined that today Yudil would be one of Tompotika's most ardent and effective conservationists.

Several years back, the AIto team visited the Head of Pangkalaseang village in Tompotika to ask his recommendation. We wanted someone who could guide us into Tompotika's little-known forest interior, with its rivers, waterfalls, and wildlife. The Village Head directed us to Yudil Dilao, one of the village's most skilled and prolific hunters. Growing up, Yudil says, hunting was his "hobby"; accompanied by dogs or setting snares, he would disappear for days at a time into the forest, and come home laden with anoa (dwarf buffalo), deer, hornbills, and all manner of Sulawesi's unique—and mostly imperiled—wildlife. He ate and sold the meat, but mostly he did it, he says, because he loved being out in the forest, and at that time, he was unaware of how hunting pressure, along with shrinking forests, was threatening the wildlife he loved.



Pangji Kresno

Yudil in his element... one of the forest areas AIto and Yudil are working to protect, together.

Now a strong convert to the conservation cause, Yudil and his wife Ida keep a sharp eye on everything going on in their neighborhood, and champion conservation amongst their neighbors. Yudil was instrumental in helping AIto purchase land from local landowners for the new Panganian wildlife reserve; he is also tireless in patrolling adjacent forest areas. One day, Yudil returned to camp after patrolling an area that had already been checked by others. Opening his fist, he slapped down a dozen nearly-invisible fishing-line snares he'd found set to catch maleos. He then began naming the individuals who had set them—he could tell whose they were, he said, by the style of their snare-sets.

It would be hard to say who is prouder or more enthusiastic about their partnership—Yudil or the AIto team. But this much is clear: working together is a joy for all, and all are benefiting—not least, maleos and all other wild forest dwellers... ~



Adarsh Raju

Street Cred. Yudil has lived all his life in Tompotika's village of Pangkalaseang, and no one knows its forests and wildlife better. But where he used to hunt and kill wildlife for food and "hobby," now he is one of the most enthusiastic advocates for their protection. And when Yudil talks, other hunters listen.

But in the last several years, over the course of many treks together, Yudil and AIto staff have become fast friends, each learning from the other the wisdom that traditional knowledge and science have to offer one another. Yudil himself has noticed the decline, over time, of much of the wildlife he loves; with AIto's help, he now realizes it is happening everywhere, and he has the power to help stop it. Acting entirely voluntarily, Yudil now no longer hunts any imperiled species, and he's quick to urge others to do the same.

Yudil is the consummate woodsman. When in the forest, he points out which vines you can cut and drink water from like a faucet; he treats wounds and fevers with forest plants; and he helps feed the team from common wild foods. He often hikes barefoot: "I can feel which rocks are slippery that way," he says. Yudil carries almost nothing with him for an overnight in the forest, save for his sprightly, colorful Watch-Rooster, Tugan, who travels in a converted thermos under his arm. In camp, Yudil explains, Tugan is indispensable; one can sleep peacefully knowing the rooster will sound the alarm if there are any snakes nearby.



Marcy Summers

Rarely seen without a machete on his belt, Yudil and AIto staff member Agus use river rocks for sharpening.

COVID-19 in Tompotika (continued from p.1)

when the guards patrolling sea turtle nesting beaches live just a stone's throw from the beach, all they have to do is step outside to do their work. And as people around the world are discovering, stepping outside is one of the healthiest and most regenerative things a person can do in these times--especially if it's also your source of income! Fortunately, and thanks to vigorous government efforts, rates of COVID-19 in Tompotika's villages and the gateway city, Luwuk, remain very low. And, where early on AITo provided various forms of food and economic aid to our villager partners, the government has also largely taken over that task. One very popular benefit AITo continues to offer to our villager partners, however, is face masks with the AITo logo.

For AITo staff, COVID has meant adjustments, but generally staff remain happy in their work and grateful that, thanks to AITo's international network of supporters, they still have jobs. Conservation Officer Pandy Fanddri says, "I like it [in the field]. It's far from the noise of the city and air pollution." Working in small teams with reduced outside social contact, staff say, "It's quiet. We rely on each other more."

Meanwhile, the tropical forests, beaches, and critters of Tompotika carry on. As the sea turtle nesting season ends, the high season for maleo nesting is just beginning. Nature's cycles go on. As trying as these times are for humans, with AITo there, times have never been brighter for the rich and biodiverse wild Life of Tompotika. ~



Over 600 locally-made masks have been distributed to schoolkids and others in our partner villages. The kids hate wearing masks, but they think the AITo ones are cool.

Sign of the Times



AITo's conservation and public outreach efforts are making a difference. In Banggai Regency, of which Tompotika is a part, incumbent Herwin Yatim is running for re-election as *Bupati*, or Regency Executive. As a sign of the maleo's growing popularity, witness Herwin's campaign billboard above. The text reads (in translation from Bahasa Saluan, one of the local languages): "**Love Herwin as we love the Maleo Bird!**" ~

Outreach: AITo goes home

In all of Tompotika, schools will be closed for the rest of 2020 due to COVID-19. And unlike in many places, in Tompotika there is no internet, no online learning. Children are simply expected to study at home on their own or in small groups, with occasional visits from a teacher.

In normal times, AITo outreach teams would be in the schools every day helping kids learn about and appreciate nature. But no school doesn't mean no AITo! On the contrary: thousands of Tompotika kids stuck at home with little to do represents a great opportunity to encourage nature exploration and ensure kids get its soul-satisfying benefits at the same time. So, in a quick programmatic "pivot," AITo has produced a series of guided activities designed to help kids learn about wild nature in the Tompotika forests and beaches that are their backyards. AITo's *Become a Nature Detective* series challenges kids to look closely at what's around them. Can you spot birds showing each of the colors of the rainbow? Can you find a leaf that is fuzzy? Shiny? Toothed? How many different kinds of butterflies can you spot?



Adrianus Bawotong

Given that the COVID-19 pandemic likely originated in hunted bats sold in a bushmeat market, AITo has also taken advantage of this "teachable moment" by producing a children's story, called *The Bat, the Virus, and the Forest*, that explains the connection between bat conservation, the health of tropical forests, and human health. AITo's villager partners near Tompotika's Bat Island, Tangkuladi, can be very proud: by working with AITo to protect the island, they have prevented exactly the kind of disaster that the world now suffers from with COVID-19. Thanks, Tompotika! ~

Partnership *(continued from p.1)*

of a common, larger goal. In the case of the maleo, the prospect of preventing its extinction brought people out of the woodwork: local villagers (who themselves come in many stripes), government officials, conservation scientists from within and beyond Indonesia, birders and others in the international conservation community, even non-conservationists who simply liked seeing local communities empowered.

Building a partnership from such numerous and disparate stakeholders is neither quick nor easy. A true partnership is not a transaction—you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours—but a commitment to *relationships*. We all commit to the sharing, negotiations, and compromises of working together, whatever it takes, to find a common, better way forward in how we humans treat the maleo. We do this because we believe that in the service of our common goal, we are much stronger together—each having contributed their diverse knowledge, perspectives, and skills—than separately.

Of course, there's a further challenge: perhaps the most important "stakeholders" of them all—the maleos themselves—cannot sit at our tables, drink our coffee, and articulate their own wishes. In order to prevent the maleo's extinction at our hands, we humans must come together with as much good science, imagination, and empathy as we can muster, and try to speak on their behalf. This is what the ALTo partners have tried to do over the past 14 years, with a plan involving protection of the habitat, a complete ban on poaching, and jobs for locals as guards.

And it seems to be working. The maleos appear to be thriving: their numbers have quadrupled, and more maleos can be seen in Taima than anywhere else on earth. Furthermore, Taima maleos display relaxed behaviors, such as lingering, resting, and preening, that are simply not seen elsewhere. For the humans of all stripes who came together to help facilitate this, simply bearing witness to the recovery of the maleos and their habitat has been enormously rewarding. But beyond that, the work of collabora-

"The aim of conservation itself is not only to conserve, but for humanity and nature to ennoble one another."

**- IPAN DJANO,
ALTO CONSERVATION OFFICER**

tion itself—the relationships built, the connectedness that all have come to feel, across boundaries of nation, race, culture, and even species—give a sense of deep gladness, strength, and hope for the future. In the words of ALTo staff member Ipan Djano, "The aim of conservation itself is not only to conserve, but for humanity and nature to ennoble one another. This way a balance is created that can be safeguarded into the future." ~

Big and Small:

ALTo's 2020 sea turtle season brings more healthy babies, while adults keep coming

As the humans struggle to cope with COVID-19, the sea turtles of Tompotika have struggled just to keep doing what, for the first 100 million years of their existence, was relatively easy: survive. Although COVID-19 meant that the number of ALTo staff and community beach patrollers was reduced and spread out, female olive ridley, green, and hawksbill turtles continued to dodge in-water threats like poaching, plastic entanglement, and entrapment as bycatch to haul themselves up on the beaches and lay their precious eggs.

If they have made it this far, however, and have the additional good luck to nest on ALTo partner beaches, then their prospects are bright. Their eggs, which would otherwise almost certainly be illegally taken, will instead be protected, and relocated to a hatchery where they can develop in safety for the next 6-8 weeks.



But this time also holds perils for the developing hatchlings: each year, some portion of the eggs die before reaching the sea as hatchlings, due to infertile eggs, too much moisture, weak hatchlings, or other natural causes. But here's the great news for 2020: this year, a higher proportion of live, healthy babies reached the sea than ever before, with over 78% of eggs laid resulting in healthy hatchlings successfully reaching the sea. That means the system is working!

These babies will still need two decades or more in the ocean to grow up and return to Tompotika to nest as adults. And though they will face many dangers while at sea, experience all over the world has shown: if nesting beaches can be protected from egg-taking by humans, sea turtle populations can and do recover. But we're happy to be patient; ALTo and our partners are committed to protecting Tompotika's nesting beaches for the long term. ~



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The Faces of ALTO: Ichsan Tobing: Advisor, Ally, Advocate

Courtesy photo



Ichsan Tobing is a unique voice on ALTO's new Advisory Council. Not only is Ichsan a businessman—the first among ALTO's Boards and Advisors—but he is an *Indonesian* businessman and consultant, and understands the mindset of urban Indonesians who may be far removed from the villagers with whom ALTO works most closely.

Growing up, Ichsan watched his father work his way up the ladder at Indonesia's national bank, struggling to gain each promotion from his humble beginnings as an "office boy" to a senior manager. Ichsan inherited his father's entrepreneurial spirit, and he loves to make business happen, to start things. "It breaks my heart when I see an empty store," he says. Developing a new enterprise—a business or a non-profit organization—is not easy, Ichsan says, but "a business like ALTO is like a soul. A living thing—a person extended into a business."

Becoming involved in conservation, Ichsan says, has been a "learning journey." When he was a kid and a young businessman in Indonesia, "Growth meant bricks and mortar. Also grass and cement. Mud is bad. You need buildings, AC!" The need to consider the effects of human activities, to spend time in wild nature, and to protect it, was far from his consciousness. But over time, Ichsan credits his American wife Sharon, an Earthwatch project in Africa, and even his own children as helping him to become more appreciative of nature and the need for conservation. "You need to find the balance. Find the harmony."

When he learned about the plight of the maleo bird, Ichsan was inspired to help. "I love the story [of the maleo].... Endangerment is conflict, and conflict stories fuel me." He was drawn to ALTO's commitment to recovering the maleo, and the working model of partnership: "I want that that fire will never die. ALTO is needed as a model. It's almost an extension of religion. Unconditional love."

As a member of ALTO's new Advisory Council, Ichsan is active in helping to define the large-scale values and strategies for the organization. But he's also generous with his time in many other ways, from advising on writing projects—he's an accomplished writer and political commentator himself—to navigating Indonesian legal matters. Ichsan would like to see ALTO sponsoring outreach efforts aimed at Indonesians of all stripes, especially beyond Tompotika: rural and urban, rich and poor, old and young. "We want everyone to feel, 'I'm a part of this.'" ~