



Alliance for Tompotika Conservation Aliansi Konservasi Tompotika

NEWSLETTER

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A New Era: Bat Island Receives Official Government Protected Status

The bats of Tompotika, so essential to the health of native forests and human crops, are finally getting some respect: their island home, Tangkuladi, is now a new government-declared, officially protected area. In fact, Tompotika bats are on a roll.

The good news began about a year ago, when ALTO successfully negotiated a conservation lease for the key daytime bat roosting site, *Pulau Tangkuladi*. Last month, feeling that the conservation lease has been a success for all concerned, island landowners agreed to extend ALTO's lease for another five years, through September 2019. Perhaps most critically for their actual protection, though they suffered intense hunting pressure in years past, the bats (*continued on p. 2*)



Noval Suling

Tangkuladi, an island of about 7 ha (17 acres), sits less than a mile offshore of Taima village.

Maleos: How Bright the Future!

Existing project strengthened, new project begun

In the past few weeks, the maleos of Tompotika have received a double shot of good news. Although the previous twelve months had their ups and downs, with the recent signing of a new long-term contract in Taima village, ALTO's flagship maleo conservation program is now in better shape than ever; better yet, in collaboration with Teku and Towner villages, ALTO has just launched a brand new maleo conservation program at a new location in the region.

Taima: World's Best Maleo Site

In the eight years since ALTO has been working with villagers to ensure its protection, Tompotika's maleo nesting ground near the village of Taima has grown to become

the largest, most productive nesting ground known anywhere on the entire 190,000 km² (76,000 mi²) island of Sulawesi (and since the maleo occurs only on Sulawesi, that means anywhere in the world). Virtually any day of the year, maleos can be seen nesting at the Taima location, and on some days, the nesting ground is veritably *crowded*--on one day this year, for instance, a record 56 birds were seen at once. Outside of this site, the endangered maleo has been in decline for decades; the Taima site alone now hosts such healthy--and increasing--numbers of maleos. But in September 2013, conservation efforts suffered



Kevin Schafer

Kicking up their heels: Sufficient natural habitat and a nesting ground safe from human predation is pretty much all maleo birds need to survive. They now have **two** such safe nesting grounds in Tompotika!



"Darling, I've something to tell you.
We're going to be a little less extinct."

a setback when ALTO's collaboration contract with Taima village expired, and the parties were unable to reach agreement on a new contract. For five months, lacking a conservation accord, poachers raided the nesting ground, illegally taking over 400 eggs while ALTO staff worked feverishly towards a solution. Much to our relief, an interim contract was signed and all poaching (*continued on p. 3*)

Tangkaladi Island Now Fully Protected *(continued from p.1)*

of Tangkuladi are now zealously protected from hunting by the very same villagers who once used to capture and sell them for the commercial bushmeat market. And to make it all official, in the past few months the regional government has declared Tangkuladi a new *Kawasan Konservasi Perairan Daerah* (KKPD), or Locally-declared Marine Protected Area.

Credit for creation of the new KKPD goes largely to *Pak Kundrat Mombilia*, Head of the Department of Oceans and Fisheries for the Banggai Regency, of which the entire Tompotika peninsula is a part. Soft-spoken but far-seeing, when AITo staff called his attention to Tangkuladi's critical role in providing a resting place for both forest bats and nesting sea turtles, *Pak Kundrat*

acted quickly to facilitate the island's designation as a formal protected area under the law.

The result is perhaps an ideal example of teamwork on behalf of imperiled nature. AITo provides the science, training, and resources to protect the island. Local villagers who live every day, all their lives within sight of the island provide the constant care and vigilance needed to guard and steward it. And *Pak Kundrat* and the regional government provide a legal and regulatory basis to uphold the whole process. But the strongest factor of all is also the one we have worked hardest to build together: the *will*. Human will to protect it, though newly budded for Tangkuladi, is now broadly present and growing. Our task now is to nurture it. If we do our job right, together, then that will is bound to bloom and grow in the years to come. And the bats, we hope, will do the same. ~



Every night the sky is speckled with thousands of fruit bats, such as this Sulawesi Flying Fox, who leave Tangkuladi to forage in the forests of Tompotika. Photos: L: Noval Suling R: Oliver Hensel-Brown

L: Oliver Hensel-Brown R: Suzette Stephens



L: Kundrat Mombilia, effective advocate for conservation and key AITo partner. R: A new sign designates Tangkuladi as a formally protected area.

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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Teku Sea Turtle Program Keeps On Growing!

Last month, two uniformed soldiers from the Indonesian military went out in a boat near Teku/Toweer village. Along with some fish, they captured two sea turtles. But not for long: despite their powerful figures and high status, nearby fishermen saw them catch the turtles, approached, and explained to them that sea turtles are protected, and they must let them go. And that's just what the soldiers did!

Such stories are becoming common around Teku/Toweer village, where AITo's sea turtle collaboration with locals gains momentum every year. In the last four seasons in this village, for example, the number of baby turtles that successfully hatched and made it to the ocean (rather than being dug up and consumed as eggs) has more than quadrupled, from 510 in 2011 to well over 2000 in both the past two years. "I'm strict," says Aswin Asamin, Village Head of Toweer, who himself regularly patrols the beaches for turtle poachers. "Most of the poachers now are from outside. In our village, people no longer take eggs." Next year, *Pak Aswin* has agreed to help lead outreach efforts to neighboring villages to expand the safety net. "We can become a sea turtle capital," he says. "That's our future."



Kevin Schafer

On its way... A baby green turtle reaches the surf.

Maleo conservation efforts now stronger than ever (continued from p. 1)

was successfully halted in March of this year, but that represented a short-term agreement only; the splendid news is that on October 1, 2014, a new five-year agreement was signed which puts greater safeguards than ever in place for Taima maleos. And perhaps the most significant aspect of the latest negotiations process was this: it was *easy*. Although for some time Taima village has experienced interior disunity and factionalism, something quite wonderful occurred when ALTo staff and village leaders sat down to negotiate the long-term contract. Maybe it was the fact that the recent interim contract had worked so smoothly; maybe it was that village leaders are making strides in bringing the community together. Whatever the reason, after eight years of collaboration and a brief glimpse of the chaos that resulted without it, villagers' will to keep working with ALTo--and to keep spearheading a maleo comeback--seems to have grown stronger than ever.

Teku/Tower Village: New maleo project begins in biodiversity haven

Just as eight years of trust-building has borne fruit in Taima with the recent long-term maleo and bat island agreements, ALTo staff were thrilled and grateful last month when village heads and community members in Towner and Teku villages eagerly embraced the opportunity to launch a new collaborative maleo conservation effort in their jurisdiction. ALTo began working with this community in 2008 (at that time the two villages were only one, Teku), teaming with villagers to patrol and protect sea turtles and their nests (*see article p. 2*). Teku/Towner has also been the site of numerous other ALTo activities in the years since: beach clean-ups, birding trainings, community mural painting, etc. Part of the reason ALTo is so pleased to work with Teku/Towner is due to the excellent quality of the village's leadership and collective decision-making skills: though now two separate villages, this is a very mutually-supportive, cohesive community. It's also home to fantastic biodiversity: Teku/Towner comprises sandy beaches, offshore seagrass beds, intact forests, mangroves, two rivers, and two brackish-water lagoons, making it one of the richest natural habitats in all of Tompotika.

Recent surveys confirmed it: on a remote beach some distance from the village center, maleos still come to nest, making a long journey through steep forested headlands to get there. There's a great deal we don't yet know about these maleos: how many come to nest each day? Do they come year-round? And much more. But starting now, a team composed of one ALTo staff member and one villager will camp near the nesting ground for a week at a time, observing and recording maleos... and preventing the poaching of their eggs that used to occur by fishermen passing by. From now on, there will be chicks!

Whatever the current numbers, the establishment of this second safe maleo nesting site marks a big leap forward for the maleo's long-term well-being. With this new project, ALTo's maleo conservation work grows from the world's most successful one-site program to a landscape-scale, multi-site effort. When combined with the growing awareness that Tompotika residents are gaining about their natural heritage, the prospects for recovery of the endangered maleo--not just in one area, but across the region--are looking very bright indeed. ~



Noval Suliling

We'll be seeing more of you... This maleo chick emerged only moments before this shot, after hatching deep underground. Note the grains of sand still in its eyes!



Marcy Summers

Reachable only by boat or a difficult trek, this remote beach is the site of ALTo's new maleo conservation project.

Recent surveys confirmed it: on a remote beach some distance from the village center, maleos still come to nest,



Marcy Summers

Maleos pass this lagoon on their way from forest to nesting ground. Happily for maleos and other wildlife, the area's coastal beaches are connected by natural vegetation all the way to the distant forest interior.



Oliver Hensel-Brown

Festival 2015: Maleos and Sea Turtles Scale it Up!

The 2014 Tompotika youth drama festival reported on in ALTo's previous (June '14) newsletter was a huge success with locals: virtually everyone--community leaders, participants, and audience members--felt that it was a very effective conservation outreach effort, and all had a great time as well! But there was one consistent bit of feedback: "How come only 12 lucky kids got to participate? Please do more activities like this. And please try to involve more people!"

We heard it. In the works for early next year is a half-day Festival featuring multiple activities, performances, and events, all celebrating maleos and sea turtles, and involving adults and kids of all ages--something *conservation* for everyone! Stay tuned.



The Faces of AlTo: Dr. John Tasirin, Sulawesi's Native Son

Michael Henier



The scientist has a sense of humor. John Tasirin is not only a tireless advocate for nature; he also tells great jokes. Here, *Pak* John entertains Tompotika kids with a maleo puppet.

Pick up a seed in the forest or a shell on the beach in Sulawesi, and AlTo Indonesia Board member Dr. John Tasirin will likely tell you a game he used to play with it as a boy. A native of Tomohon and Manado, North Sulawesi, John grew up playing outside with other kids. As a boy getting to know the plants and animals around him, John says, "The first question was: can we eat it?" In catching a bird, for instance, he and his buddies would always cook and taste it.

Pak John's commitment to conservation evolved later on. As a university student in Manado, John studied silviculture and joined the local Nature Lover's club--he liked hiking and spending time in the woods. "But that's not enough," he feels. Like most Indonesians, *Pak* John says he did not yet, at that time, have a conservation ethic. He knew that Indonesia had national parks, and "it was nice to have forests, it was fun to identify plants, birds, and insects, but the passion wasn't there." It wasn't until later, when he entered a Master's program at University of New Brunswick in Canada, that John began to think of nature as something that deserves and requires human care. "That was the start." In Canada and then while getting his PhD in Australia, John gained an appreciation for native species, habitat for wildlife, and the connection between study and conservation. "In Indonesia, we don't educate people enough. I came to the realization that I need to do that in Manado." *Pak* John now teaches and supervises students at Universitas Sam Ratulangi in Manado, but he's also involved in numerous on-the-ground conservation efforts. Highly respected by his peers and a close consultant to government, *Pak* John singlehandedly has probably made a greater contribution to conservation in North Sulawesi than just about anyone.

AlTo is extremely fortunate to have *Pak* John's energy, commitment, knowledge, and wisdom on our Indonesian Board. "AlTo is small, but every time we talk about a program, it is achieved. We've got an example there of success, and lessons learned for other organizations to follow." The conservation ethic in Indonesia "is late in coming. The population has exploded. People live day by day. TV exposes them to a desire for advancement. It's a struggle to make people understand." But John likes AlTo's approach. "Every single creature has a purpose. Everything is connected. The culture that we're introducing people to is different--it's not theirs, but it's also not American. It's something different--it's... well, it's just the truth!" With leadership from folks like *Pak* John, we'll continue to try to discover what that "truth" might look like, together.

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