



# Alliance for Tompotika Conservation Aliansi Konservasi Tompotika

NEWSLETTER

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## Bring in the Light! New Children's Library Established in Tompotika

**"Whenever you read a good book, somewhere in the world a door opens to allow in more light." –Vera Nazarian**

It was an idea that immediately captured the imaginations of ALTO team members. On a recent check-in, when asked what his village most needs, Pak Adolof Raja, community leader and teacher in ALTO's partner village of Tanah Merah, responded, "Books. Our children have no books." The kids learn to read in school with government-issued textbooks, but once they have learned how, they have nothing left to read. No books at home, no books in the village, no books at school. As a kind of "thank you" to the village for its partnership in conserving the native rainforests and wildlife surrounding their mountain village, ALTO provides various types of community benefits. Might it be possible, Pak Adolof wondered, for us to provide some children's books?



**Thirty-two new worlds to explore.** At the book reception gathering, Tanah Merah schoolchildren get a peek at the new fiction and non-fiction books now available to them.

**One book, two languages.** ALTO Director Marcy Summers shows community leader and teacher Pak Adolof Raja how the "lift-the-flap" translation works.

A quick review of what is available in Bahasa Indonesia, the national language, revealed that picture books and literature for children are extremely limited. Yet in English, the reverse is true: a rich and varied feast of books is available for children of all ages. Why not just select some of the best ones, do our own in-house translations, and bring them *(continued on p. 2)*

## Climate Change in Tompotika: Fires, Floods, and Failed Crops

We've all heard it: climate change is causing extreme weather events all over the world. We've probably also heard the point made that the impacts of climate change are being felt most profoundly by the world's poor and most vulnerable (this is usually referring to the human community, but the same is generally true for non-human biodiversity). But what does that look like in Tompotika? In the last newsletter, we featured one end of the extreme weather spectrum: droughts and fires. Read on for the other.

### Part Two: Floods and Failed Crops

2015 was the world's hottest year in human records, and the effects of a warming planet and the periodic El Niño event caused extreme drought and fires throughout Tompotika. But the El Niño effect was an exception: generally speaking, with warming temperatures, Tompotika has been seeing not drought, but increased rainfall.

Here is what used to be "normal" for Tompotika: about 2500-3000 mm (100-120") of rain per year, with some of that falling every month of the year, but with 7-9 "wet" months (rain nearly every day) and 3-5 "dry" months (often several days between rains). Overall, a lot of rain--this is, after all, the home of tropical rainforests!--but in a pattern to which plants, animals, and people were adapted. In *(continued on p. 3)*



**Who'll stop the rain?** Cashew trees need a minimum interval of rain-free days in order to flower and produce fruit. Those intervals are growing rare in Tompotika, and so are cashews.

Sheila Eckman

Sheila Eckman

Pandji Kresno

## New Kids' Library in Tompotika (continued from p.1)

to Tanah Merah for Pak Adolof to set up a school library?

AITo Athena's Circle member Anne Hunt and U.S. Board member Rayna Holtz, both professional librarians, immediately volunteered to help, and soon 32 titles were selected. We sought a collection with a mix of age ranges, fiction and non-fiction. The titles feature a variety of cultures, habitats, themes, and artistic styles, and the books had to be translatable--for instance, without excessive dependence on rhyme, rhythm, or references unfamiliar to rural Indonesian kids (e.g. Happy Meals). Not all the books are about nature and

animals, but they all feature sub-

jects and values consistent with conservation, from *The Great Kapok Tree* to *Frederick* to *The Way to Start a Day*.

AITo staff and a smattering of bilingual volunteers did the translations, and over the 2015 holiday season, AITo supporters generously sponsored the purchase of five copies of each title. A little card carrying the translation was inserted in each page, such that both the Indonesian and the original English are visible, and at a recent gathering, the first load of books was delivered to Tanah Merah's small primary school (grades 1-6).

Students and all the school's teachers gathered for the event. The children, a little shy in the face of this rich array of books that was now theirs, scrutinized the covers but didn't touch while the formal handover took place and the grown-ups spoke. Said Pak Adolof, "Some of these children will grow up to be farmers, some mechanics, some will work in the city. But they can all learn to care for the forests and wildlife. And this gift of books will help each one no matter what work they grow up to do." Pak Adolof said he plans to create a special "reading time" in each school day, where kids will come five at a time to read from the new library. It's a new library without walls, but with 32 new open doors, and oh, such brilliant new light! ~

### Still time to sponsor a book!

The first books have now been delivered, but AITo's Children's Library Project continues with new titles and new schools. You can sponsor a book in a Tompotika primary school library for \$25 or \$40. See the list of titles at [www.tompotika.org](http://www.tompotika.org), or contact AITo for more information.



Anton Struchkov

**Words and pictures.** Tanah Merah schoolkids, teachers, and AITo staff at the launch of their school's new library. Said one staffer: "I've never seen books like these. The stories, the artwork, the quality of the paper, the bindings--I'm so excited to read them all!"

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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### Maleo Program Stronger than Ever

Three terrific bits of news come from AITo's maleo program of late. First, we were delighted to sign a **renewed and strengthened five-year MoU** with the government to continue protecting maleos and their nesting grounds in Tompotika. Second, thanks to thoughtful and committed advocacy by Taima villager Adrianto Panigoro, **revenue from AITo's conservation lease of the maleo nesting ground now goes to fund a program providing free rice for anyone in the village** who may need it. Thus, in addition to employment and tourism income, every Taima villager, especially the poorest, can directly experience the benefits of conserving their endangered maleos. And finally, in January 2016, maleo numbers at the Taima nest-



Kevin Schafer

ing ground hit a **new record high: 60 maleos seen at one time!** This is the largest number since records have been kept, and the only known location where such numbers exist. **Thank you** to AITo donors, who have made all this possible! ~

## Climate Change: Floods and Failed Crops (continued from p.1)

recent years, however, that pattern has been changing: not only is the overall amount of rainfall increasing, but the periods of rain-free days are shrinking.

This is having profound consequences, the most dramatic of which is outright flooding. Rivers overrun their banks, bridges are washed out, villages and fields are inundated, people's homes and



Tom Paragi

**Squeezed by both drought and floods**, Tompotika farmers like Pak Gusti are watching their crops fail repeatedly. They have no safety net; no alternate source of food and minimal income.

possessions are destroyed--and it's no longer a rare occurrence, but is happening more and more frequently. When such disasters strike, folks are mostly on their own; government capacity to help is very limited.

Quieter but equally serious disasters are taking place in the fields and forests. For instance, increased rainfall can cause nutrient leaching, soil erosion, and landslides. That makes it harder for many plants to grow, whether they be human crops or native flora. And in some areas, entire villages are largely dependent on single crops, whose failure can have devastating consequences. In Tompotika's Tanah Merah village, for example (see Book article, p. 1), cashew nuts have long been the main cash crop, but repeated failures due to excessive rainfall are forcing villagers to seek alternatives, some of which may be destructive. (AIto is helping in various ways to seek sustainable alternatives). Like cashew trees, many wild rainforest trees require rain-free periods for fruiting, and given that Sulawesi is particularly rich in frugivorous (fruit-eating) wildlife, the consequences of fruit failures are being felt widely and deeply throughout the ecosystem.

Our understanding of the complex and cascading effects of climate change is as yet in its infancy. We do know that it's our habits in the Global Consumer Class that are its primary drivers. But if we needed more intimate knowledge of its effects on the rest of the world to help motivate us to change those habits, we need look no further than Tompotika. ~



Noval Suling

**This used to be a road.** When floods make roads impassable, resourceful locals may fashion rafts to navigate the new waterways, but normal transportation, markets, and routines may be disrupted for months.

## On the Tarsier Trail: Survey finds tarsiers of Tompotika are abundant and distinctive

Some facts are clear: tarsiers (*Tarsius* spp.) are among the world's smallest primates, they're the only strictly carnivorous primates, and Sulawesi is the global center of their diversity, with at least 8 and possibly many more Sulawesi tarsier species. Previous work by Dr. Myron Shekelle and others has shown that each tarsier species has its own particular set of vocalizations; one group does not respond to the calls of another. But what species is present in Tompotika has been a mystery. Is it the same species as nearby surveys have identified? Or is it a new, previously-undescribed species?

This past Jan-Feb, Dr. Shekelle, with AIto staff and a group of six volunteers, set out to begin answering that question. The group had a chance to enjoy all the natural wonders that Tompotika offers: maleos, bat caves, forest hikes, snorkeling, and more--but they also rose before dawn each day to listen and watch for tarsiers coming home to their roost trees after a night's foraging.



Tom Paragi



Noval Suling

**Still a little blurry.** Further investigation is needed before it will be clear exactly what species this tarsier, photographed at AIto's Camp Home Sweet Home, belongs to.

What did they learn? That there are lots of tarsiers in Tompotika, in many different habitats. That tarsier calls are very high-pitched and can be hard to hear. That seeing them is even harder, but a great thrill! That females sing first in Tompotika duet calls, whereas in many other regions, males sing first. And that more research is needed. The group took recordings of Tompotika tarsiers in various locations, and these must be analyzed and compared with vocalizations from other known locations in Sulawesi. That process is now underway; stay tuned to see where Tompotika's tarsier trail ends up! ~



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## The Faces of ALTO: Sheila Eckman, ALTO's Program Assistant



Mary Ellen Walker

**Sheila Eckman in Tompotika.** Sheila helps ALTO with everything from fundraising to databases to research. She enjoys being a small part of a global struggle. "In the environmental field, often you don't see instant results. But I've seen environmental changes and improvements over time, due to hard work and the uphill battle of some people."

Chances are, if you've had any contact with ALTO recently, you've benefited from her thoughtful, competent touch: for more than a year now, Sheila Eckman has been helping the U.S.-based engine of the ALTO organization run smoothly. But with a Master's in Geo-Environmental Studies and years of experience, Sheila brings a great deal more to the job than just efficient organizational operations. Having taken early retirement two years ago after 25 years working for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Sheila was overqualified for the 5-hr-a-week administrative and jack-of-all-trades position she was hired for at ALTO. So why did she seek it? "I was attracted by ALTO and this work because it's in line with my values and experience. The environment, especially today, is our most important issue. It's gratifying to help an organization that's doing something to conserve what we can and adapt to the changes that are coming."

Sheila loves animals, the outdoors, walking and kayaking--and she's also an accomplished artist. Recently, she joined ALTO's tarsier survey trip to Tompotika. Easygoing and ever-curious, Sheila was up for any activity, and even on car rides was glued to the window, fascinated by Tompotika's villages, people, and landscape. She returned from the trip with renewed dedication to her job. "I was really impressed with ALTO's work, and seeing what a difference it makes. And I'm not just saying that--I really mean it!" Sheila especially appreciated seeing the relationships ALTO has built with local villages. "Large organizations decide what to do and go in and do it...but ALTO works with the local community to such a great extent... I got the feeling the locals felt like partners." And, she says, "The work itself is impressive--the maleos are very cool."

Sheila is keenly aware of the plight of our planet. "So few people seem to be paying attention to the changes that are coming in the next decade." In response, she likes ALTO's small geographical focus and targeted approach. "My faith has shifted to a local level, smaller scale. We can't fix everything. But a trainer once told me, 'Find the important problem, and fix it.' That's what's been done."~