



# Alliance for Tompotika Conservation Aliansi Konservasi Tompotika

NEWSLETTER

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## Going Wider and Deeper: ALTo catalyzes Sulawesi-wide outreach campaign for endan- gered forest mammals

Venture deep into the trackless jungles of Sulawesi and, if you're very lucky, you might come across a dwarf buffalo called the anoa, or the "pig-deer" babirusa. Like much of Sulawesi's fauna, these animals are...well, a bit weird; found only in Sulawesi; and, sadly, on the brink of extinction. Anoas and babirusas depend on large undisturbed tracts of forest for their survival--those same vast but shrinking forests that provide so many benefits that humans, too, rely on, such as clean water,



Billy LoIowang

oxygen, a stable climate, flood control, and much more.

But an even more immediate threat is hunting; despite decades of legal protection, these species have been hunted to oblivion in (cont. on p. 3)



Simon Purser

Anoa (top) and Babirusa (bottom) are rare mammals found only in Sulawesi's undisturbed interior forests. They share the same primary threats of hunting and deforestation--both matters that local people have the power to change.

## Eyewitness to Recovery: ALTo field trips give Tompotika kids a rare direct view of endangered maleos

For over a decade now, ALTo and our villager partners have been protecting what has, during that time, become the largest communal nesting ground anywhere for the endangered maleo bird, *Macrocephalon maleo*.

This is also the only maleo conservation project that is marking a consistent *increase* in the maleo population, as, sadly, they continue to decline elsewhere. That recovery is good news for this iconic and culturally-important bird, which, despite its near-extinction, remains a popular mascot for the entire island of Sulawesi.

During the past decade, ALTo has also been bringing news of this marvelous bird to kids throughout the Tompotika region through our school-based Maleo Conservation Awareness Campaign. It's a very popular program, and virtually every one of Tompotika's over 100 primary, middle, and high schools have welcomed the interactive classroom presentations brought by ALTo's talented staff.



Noval Suling

*Tiptoe, whisper, and wonder:* enthralled schoolkids get to watch as, just a few meters away, endangered maleos carry out their egg-laying rituals.



Kevin Schafer

A given male-female maleo pair will dig several false nest pits over hours or days before choosing their perfect nest spot. You must watch carefully to detect when the female actually lays her one enormous egg, deep in the sand.

But it was time to go deeper. In recent months, with the able leadership of ALTo's new Outreach Specialist, Maryati Abiduna, a regular program of field trips has begun not just telling kids about maleos, but actually bringing them to the nesting ground to see these endangered birds for themselves.

(continued on p. 2)

## Maleo field trips for schoolkids (continued from p.1)

Sandhy Bawotong



*"Home Sweet Home"* - Gathering near the nesting ground environs before and after viewing the maleos gives AIto staff the opportunity to talk about the importance of habitat.

program is proving so popular that the AIto team is now discussing adult field trips as well).

The program begins at AIto's Camp Home Sweet Home--about a 10-minute walk from the maleo nesting area. Staff review the information introduced the day before, and the rules for visitors--about small groups, quiet voices, slow movements, etc.--are listed and explained. Maleos and other wildlife perceive and respond to things differently than do we humans, and it's all about respect for their needs. The staff also point out--with on-site examples--why proper trash disposal to prevent litter on land and

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!

### Contact Us:

Marcy Summers, Director  
Alliance for Tompotika Conservation (AIto)  
21416 - 86th Ave SW  
Vashon Island, WA 98070 USA

+1 206 463 7720

info@tompotika.org  
www.tompotika.org

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Wista Lamato, 17  
Noval Suling

For, though Tompotika has become a stronghold for the species, the fact remains that most people have never seen one directly.

It's a two-day program. On the first day, AIto staff begin in the classroom, introducing kids, if they haven't been already, to what a maleo bird is, why it's endangered, why it matters, and what can be done to help it. Then, on the second day--armed with all the new knowledge and stories they have heard about this remarkable bird, so iconic in their culture--the students pile into the closest thing to a school bus available (see photo below) for up to an hour for the journey to see for themselves. Teachers and school administrators angle for the chance to chaperone, as total numbers allowed in the nesting ground environs are strictly limited (the



Noval Suling

ocean is so important. And then, four by four, the kids get to creep up to the viewing blind and watch live maleos--

maybe just a few pairs, maybe dozens--digging their nest pits and laying eggs in the sand. For most of us, that first view of a maleo is a breathless moment.

After all have seen the maleos, the group gathers again for snack and discussion. Students ask questions, or comment on the sound of the maleo's voice, or the pink color of its chest. And, invariably, they mention how glad they are to see one directly for the first time.

For the maleos, this is a rare safe place where they can come to ensure their own continued existence on this planet.



*Magic School Bus.* After the field trip, the kids are loaded up onto the local "school bus" for the journey back to their home village and school.

For these kids, the experience of witnessing that process is a rare discovery and a privilege. AIto's aim, going forward, is to make both a great deal less rare. ~

## New outreach program aims at saving weird forest mammals (continued from p.1)

most of their historic range. The fact is, most local people in the areas where anoa and babirusa remain extant don't realize that they've been nearly exterminated, nor that hunting them is illegal. They're also generally unaware of how the health of forests depends on healthy wildlife populations, or, finally, how humans themselves so fundamentally need forests to survive. If anything is to be done to save anoas and babirusas, it has to start by raising awareness amongst local Sulawesians near the places where these marvelous creatures still survive.

That means Tompotika—but also beyond. Thus, AITo is facilitating a collaboration with two other local organizations working in distant regions of Sulawesi—Tasikoki



**Museum quality.** This plastic cast of a babirusa skull shows how the curving tusks grow out of the upper jaw and may even, in time, pierce the male's forehead.

Wildlife Rescue and Education Centre in North Sulawesi; and Conservation Buton on Buton Island, Southeast Sulawesi—to design and conduct an intensive outreach campaign on behalf of anoas, babirusas, and their forest home. Targeted especially at schoolchildren and adults near to where anoas and babirusas are still being hunted, design of the outreach program and materials has recently been completed, and delivery of the three-day interactive program has begun. And we have a secret weapon: ex-hunters have joined with our experienced outreach staff to conduct the program. These men have the unique “street credibility” to help deliver the message: it is not the anoas, nor the babirusas, nor the forests, but the **hunting**, that must now go extinct. ~



**Save Sulawesi Forest (and) Wildlife,** reads the sticker, newly designed for this program by artist Sandra Noel. Along the bottom is the additional tagline: *People need forests, forests need wildlife.*

## The benefits of conservation: scholarships for rural students



Sandhy Bawotong

Facilitated by village leaders, the six students and their parents gather with AITo staff to discuss the terms of their scholarships.

This is how it works: villages partner with AITo on outreach or in-the-field conservation projects only if they choose to do so, and implementing field projects requires a significant commitment on the part of villagers and their leaders. Conservation pays off in myriad long-term ways, but as an immediate “thank you” from the international conservation community to these villages for their participation, AITo asks about their needs and helps where we can. Sometimes those needs are simple: in rural Tanah Merah village, kids who finish primary school must find some means to travel to a larger village if they want to continue to middle school. For many poor families, coming up with the roughly \$1 per day for fuel for the motorbike ride is prohibitive, and the kids are forced

to simply end their education at grade six.

So AITo is helping. This school year, six Tanah Merah families are receiving assistance so that, in a kind of motorbike carpool, their students can continue to go to school each day in a neighboring village. The kids are thrilled—several are excellent students and keenly interested in their studies. The parents are equally delighted—most are farmers, and in many cases they themselves were forced to end their schooling prematurely for want of the means to continue. But it's not an entirely free ride: in exchange for this assistance, at the end of the school year AITo has asked the students to help out in AITo field projects for up to two weeks. The additional people-power will boost AITo's field work. What is more, it will give the students the dignity of having earned their scholarships themselves. Best of all, they will learn about conservation. And, who knows? In a few years, AITo may very well have job openings for able, educated young people like these. ~



Marcy Summers

Jeffri Ato, with his parents Yesaya and Kristina. Thanks to help from AITo, Jeffri can now attend middle, and later, high school in the village of Bualemo, twenty minutes away by motorbike.



Alliance for Tompotika Conservation  
21416 86th Ave SW  
Vashon, WA 98070 USA



## The Faces of AlTo - The Babirusa: Not what you might think

It's easy to malign a pig. Members of the suid family are often considered dirty, ugly, or even wicked. In Muslim communities, pigs are *haram*--not to be touched. But in fact, even when measured by human standards, most suid species are extremely intelligent, emotionally sensitive, and adaptable--even, in the eye of many beholders, cute! The babirusa (*Babirusa spp.*) is found only in Sulawesi, and a few older, local cultures--perhaps because they came to know them better--even emphasize human kinship with this species. In Bahasa Indonesia, the national language of the archipelago, the name "*babirusa*" means "pig-deer," but in Bahasa Saluan, the traditional language of the northwestern part of Tompotika, the species is called "*sangko bulu*," which means "skin like a human."

Babirusas' favorite food is fruits, which they sniff out on the forest floor, and also display surprising agility in nibbling from low-hanging tree limbs while standing unsupported on their hind legs. Babirusas play an important role in dispersing seeds in the forest, but unlike other pigs, do not root up soil; their snouts lack the rostral bone. They build nests to sleep in at night, and

females build large, soft nests of leaves and branches to give birth.

Gentle, shy, and unobtrusive, babirusas fly in the face of many

human stereotypes about the pig family. This has not helped them avoid human persecution, however; babirusas are now threatened with extinction due to poaching and habitat loss. But it's not too late. With the new outreach program (see pp. 1-3), AlTo hopes to help humans rediscover their kinship with this underappreciated forest dweller. ~



Courtesy of David Slater [www.djsphotography.co.uk](http://www.djsphotography.co.uk)

The babirusa is the only member of the suid family whose tusks pierce through his snout. Females have small tusks, or none.



Aubrey Belford

Though also seen solitarily or in pairs, groups of babirusa females and their young will often band together in the forest, where they forage together or visit mud baths or mineral lick sites.



Adri Laise, 14