



The Alliance for Tompotika Conservation (AlTo) December 2006 Newsletter

Moratorium bears fruit: first maleo chicks hatch!

A central focus of AlTo's conservation efforts in the area around Mount Tompotika (on Indonesia's island of Sulawesi) is the maleo bird (*Macrocephalon maleo*), Sulawesi's mascot and an icon of natural and cultural heritage. Protected by Indonesian law and red-listed as Endangered by the IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature), maleo numbers have yet declined by over 90% in recent years primarily due to over-harvest of their eggs by people. **The village of Taima, near Mount Tompotika, is host to one of the most important remaining communal nesting grounds of the endangered maleo.**

On August, 1, 2006, the AlTo alliance that includes government officials, partner organizations, conservation-minded students, the Taima community, and international supporters all joined together to launch a **full moratorium on the harvest of maleo eggs at the Taima nesting ground.** Prior to the moratorium, virtually every egg painstakingly laid and buried by a maleo pair was dug up and sold as a luxury item. Today, however, with the same individuals who formerly dug for eggs now hired as guards for the nesting ground, villagers of Taima are strongly supporting the moratorium and have ceased all attempts to harvest maleo eggs for sale. The eggs were not needed for subsistence, and provided only a minimal amount of income for those who harvested them—income which, thanks to AlTo, is now more than replaced by the new guards' wages. Now, we're delighted to report that **since the start of the moratorium in August, more than 500 maleo eggs have been safely laid and protected in their natural state at the Taima nesting ground.** (For comparison, the best of the few other maleo conservation efforts in existence protected about 200 eggs during the same period).



To show their support of our efforts, the Banggai district government recently donated a new pair of signs announcing protection of the Taima nesting ground.



Maleo chick, minutes after emerging and before flying off into the forest. Note grains of sand still clinging around the eye.

And best of all, **those eggs are now hatching!** The AlTo staff who guard and record data at the Taima nesting ground observed the first maleo chick on October 22, 2006. Maleo chicks hatch from their eggs while buried a meter deep in the sand, and then spend the next 24-48 hours digging their way to the surface. They emerge from the sand at night, fully developed and feathered, and are ready to fly and fend for themselves in the forest after just a short period of rest. Since the recording of our first chick on Oct 22, AlTo staff have observed **1-3 new chicks every night** (and there are likely more that hatch and fly unobserved in the dark). These chicks would not exist without AlTo. And though there is much we still need to learn about the maleo, know this: **as an AlTo supporter, you are part of the alliance that has actually halted the decline of the maleo bird at Taima!**

Indonesia's new conservation professionals To guard the Taima nesting ground and collect scientific data on maleo behavior, former egg diggers from Taima are teamed with a new crop of bright, enthusiastic young conservationists who call themselves *Pencinta Alam* or "Nature Lovers". These local university students had already organized themselves in an outdoorspeople's club when AITo gave them jobs as maleo conservationists and budding scientists.

At the August start of the moratorium, Ikhsan, Anim, Ardat, Oniel, Eka and Agus (Indonesians often go by only one name) began the 24-hour task of guarding and observing at the nesting ground. They work in teams of two in 5-day shifts, and are joined each day by a former egg-digger from Taima village.

Every hour, these AITo guards, or "Conservation Officers," record data such as weather conditions, number of maleos at the nesting ground, eggs laid, chicks hatched, and any unusual occurrences such as visits by goats or people. The original six AITo Conservation Officers have recently been joined by a seventh, Galang, who became interested in the project and volunteered to serve as an alternate. On her recent trip to the area, AITo Director Marcy Summers spent several days with these seven, exchanging information about maleo research and observations, plus conservation plans and strategies for Tompotika's future.

In addition to providing them with jobs in conservation, AITo will encourage these very capable young people in furthering their formal education in conservation science and policy. The future of conservation in Indonesia is in their hands.



AITo Conservation Officers at the guards' post: *Front: Ikhsan. Rear, left to right: Oniel, Anim, Eka, Agus, Ardat*

Dates set for next Tompotika trip **Next year's eco-service tour to Sulawesi has been set for August 1-15, 2007.** Itinerary includes snorkeling among the world's richest coral gardens, wildlife watching in tropical rainforests, assisting with biodiversity surveys on Mount Tompotika, and celebrating the results of a maleo art exchange with residents of Taima. Group size will be limited to 10 travelers, and all-inclusive costs for the 15-day trip, including airfare from Seattle, will be about \$4000 per person. For details contact AITo at tompotika@centurytel.net or 206-463-7720.

AITo's own 501(c)3 status approved The AITo Board is happy to announce that recently our status as an **independent non-profit organization with tax-deductible status** was approved by the IRS. Special thanks to non-profit PeaceWorks International, which served as our tax-deductible fiscal agent while awaiting the IRS determination.

Your previous donation has already helped make possible a critical turnaround of the endangered maleo—thank you so much! In order to continue this work, further **contributions are greatly needed and will be most gratefully received.** *If you would prefer to receive future AITo news by e-mail, please let us know at tompotika@centurytel.net.*

Happy Holidays from all the AITo team!

The Alliance for Tompotika Conservation / Aliansi Konservasi Tompotika / AITo
21416 86th Ave SW, Vashon, WA 98070 USA ~ 206-463-7720 ~ tompotika@centurytel.net