



Alliance for Tompotika Conservation Aliansi Konservasi Tompotika

NEWSLETTER

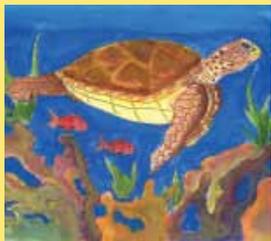
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Art for Conservation Travel: Join us to create Tompotika's first community murals

Do you like to travel, but also want to make a positive difference in the places you visit? Have an artistic bent? Like the idea of working with village kids and adults to create a lasting legacy for conservation? Then this may be the trip for you!

In November, 2011, a small group of ALTO eco-service travelers will be journeying to Tompotika to facilitate the creation of the region's first large public mural paintings. Two murals will be created, one each in the villages of Taima and Teku, and each will feature wildlife and cultural themes selected by residents of those villages. A portion of the design work will have been done ahead of time, and the ALTO travelers will work with village children and adults to do the actual painting, completing both murals during the trip. The group will also work with local kids to decorate public notice boards reminding folks of conservation areas and wildlife protection laws.

Research has shown that mural paintings can make a significant difference in strengthening local support for conservation efforts. Plus, creating art is **fun**.



Sea turtles, like this one by Tompotika high schooler Rifa'i Mashudi, are among the wildlife likely to be featured in the new murals.

The trip lasts 15 days and includes visits to key natural areas. Cost is \$2900 plus international airfare. Please contact ALTO for more information.

For the Love of Birds: New Birding Skills Come to Tompotika

After months spent exploring the island in the 1850's and '60's, the famous British naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace wrote of Sulawesi's bird fauna, "**On accurately comparing these with the birds of all the surrounding countries, we find... a degree of individuality which, considering the situation of the island, is hardly to be equalled in any other part of the world.**" On examining



The Black-naped Oriole, *Oriolus chinensis*, a common bird of Tompotika. Photo: Iwan Londo.

the birds, he wrote, "**we shall be struck by the many peculiarities of structure they present.**" Wallace was not only a brilliant thinker--though far less well-known than his compatriot Charles Darwin, Wallace developed the theory of the evolution of species at the same time as did Darwin--but he was also an extremely keen observer of everything around him. And observation skills--the first and foremost necessity for

bird-watching--are something that can be learned and improved.

Last November, ALTO staff and some of our village partners were fortunate to spend a week training with the experts. Iwan Hunowu, who currently works for the Wildlife Conservation Society in North Sulawesi, is one of Sulawesi's most knowledgeable and enthusiastic birders. He teamed up with Iwan Londo, an expert on Indonesian birds, and especially shorebirds, who runs an Indonesian birding network and website called *Burung Nusantara* (Birds of the Archipelago). Together they are a treasure-trove of information, as well as being both of them skilled and generous teachers.

The training started out with the basics: the parts of a bird, key characters to look for, bird voices, how to look for clues from habitat and behavior. Also, how to use binoculars or a spotting scope, and how to (*see Birding Training, p. 2*)



ALTO staff and partners birding at the Diongan wetland. L to R: Instructor Iwan Londo; Taima villager and ALTO Liaison Roma; ALTO staff Noval Suling, Ipan Djano, Agus Laya, Panji Kresno, Marcy Summers, and Anim Alyoihana; Instructor Iwan Hunowu.

Iwan Hunowu

Trash Awareness Campaign: Tackling the litter problem, school by school

Did you know that plastic bags floating in the water can look a lot like jellyfish, and sea turtles often eat them? Did you know that there is a collection of floating plastic the size of Borneo in the middle of the ocean, often called “The Great Pacific Garbage Patch”? That birds nesting on remote islands in the middle of the Pacific have been found dead with toothbrushes, cigarette lighters, and fishing line in their stomachs? Children and adults in Tompotika are learning these and other not-so-fun facts about what happens when plastic and other trash is discarded irresponsibly. Getting people to change their behavior takes time, but AITo’s Trash Awareness curriculum, developed



AITo Conservation Officers Noval (front right) and Ipan (rear right) lead school children and their teacher through an exercise about entanglement.

by marine expert and summer ‘10 AITo traveler Dr. Trish Mace, is making a start through outreach in Tompotika schools. Despite the unglamorous subject, the children love these gatherings, and our staff are regularly invited back!

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, innovative, 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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Butterfly by AITo Conservation Coordinator Anim Alyoihana

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Birding Training, continued from page 1

draw and take notes on what you see. All was covered in a series of open-air “classrooms,” where the group sat on beach logs to study their field guides, and practiced sketching sunbirds while they flitted from one coconut blossom to the next.

Our whirlwind birding tour covered several of Tompotika’s varied natural habitats: lowland and hill forests, estuary, freshwater wetland, ocean shoreline, and coastal scrub-shrub vegetation; and AITo staff had a chance to identify over 80 species, most--but not all--of them common in the Tompotika area.

Birding by ear was also an important component of the training. Sulawesi forests are notoriously hard to spot things in, in part because many birds tend to stay up in the canopy, far above one’s head.



Our collection of shared and borrowed binoculars, kept safe from the rain.

Learning bird songs and calls, then, becomes an essential skill for knowing what’s present, and there was much laughing and teasing while group members tried to mimic and memorize the various whistles and trills.

Rounding out our study was local bird knowledge and lore. The Yellow-billed Malkoha, *Phaenicophaeus calyrorhynchus*, for example, is a striking, colorful bird with a long tail. Locals often call it *burung monyet*, or “monkey bird,” due to its habit of following troops of monkeys to eat the insects they stir up. But if one flies across your path when you are on the road, it’s best to stop: it may be a harbinger of something untoward about to happen.

AITo’s staff were thrilled with this training. They finished the week with new energy and commitment to birds and to their conservationist comrades. This is good, but it doesn’t end there: experience in other parts of the world has shown that skilled local naturalists and guides can be the key to a long-lasting conservation constituency and economy. AITo



staff are proud to be blazing a trail in that direction.



Clockwise, from top: **Serpent-eagle, or Hawk-eagle?** Iwan Hunowu (center), Iwan Londo (right front), and AITo staff confer. **Better from the boat:** the Teku lagoon is a great place for waterfowl and raptors. **Divine things, well-hidden:** the Savanna Nightjar, *Caprimulgus affinis*, is hard to see, even when you’re looking right at her.



Taima Village Declares a New Sanctuary for Bats!

Bats can be a hard sell. After all, some people think they're intriguing, or even cute in their way. But for a lot of folks, bats are indifferent or unappealing at best, scary or downright evil at worst. Fruit bats or flying foxes, of which Sulawesi hosts at least 22 species, certainly suffer from this underappreciation: they are big and dark, and swoop around at night, and although they play an absolutely essential role in the health and sustainability of tropical forests and tree crops, that role is little known and even less credited by your average folks. Mostly, in Sulawesi, bats are seen as tradable commodities: though locals in Tompotika and many other places do not eat them themselves, bats are considered tasty morsels in the large bushmeat markets of North and South Sulawesi provinces, and in recent years bat populations all over the island have plummeted as hunters and traders have taken a huge toll on these remarkable creatures, which are helpless to avoid netting and slow to reproduce.



Taima villager and AIto Liaison Roma holds a sign declaring the island protected. The sign reads: *You are entering a wildlife protection area. It is not allowed to take or kill sea turtles or their eggs, bats, or other wildlife on this island... signed, the Citizens of Taima Village.*

And now, two miracles have occurred: the bats came back, and Taima villagers decided to protect them. Just as suddenly as they departed, the bats re-appeared one day on the island, resuming their nightly journey to the mainland forests. And Taima villagers, on their own authority, have now declared the island a wildlife protection area. AIto will continue to help with technical assistance, resources for enforcement, etc., and we have begun discussions about a long-term conservation lease to extend and strengthen the island's protection. But the fabulously good news is that for now and for the future, it has happened: Taima villagers have become sold on bats!

So, a few years ago when AIto first started conversations with residents of Tompotika's Taima village about the rare and spectacular roosting site for the endemic Sulawesi Flying Fox (*Acerodon celebensis*) on their small off-shore island, Pulau Tangkuladi, it wasn't easy to arouse their concern. The bats had always been there, hunting them was perfectly legal, and lately a few villagers were making good money selling bats to bushmeat traders. But then bat numbers started to decline dramatically, and last year the remaining bats suddenly disappeared--whether temporarily or permanently, no one knew.

The AIto team shifted into high gear. The bats' disappearance was a cautionary tale: if hunting was not curtailed, this bat colony, like so many others across Sulawesi, would likely--if not now, then later--disappear forever. That would have serious ramifications for the health of the area's forests and agricultural crops, and would also mean an end to the small stream of visitors AIto had begun bringing to see the bats and their nightly migration to the mainland (along with the maleo birds nearby). The question was entirely up to Taima villagers: because the bats enjoy no legal protection, the only way for hunting to be curtailed on the island would be for village landowners themselves to refuse permission for hunters to take wildlife on their lands. It was their choice.

Though the bats are theoretically "resting" on the island by day, it is not a scene of peace and quiet! The island's thousands of bats squeak, squabble, fuss and fidget through the day as they climb through the trees and fly low overhead. Their restlessness crescendoes until they depart at dusk in a steady stream for the mainland.



Scott Newell

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Sulawesi Flying Fox by Tompotika high school student Agus Mertha, age 16.

It's All About Relationships: Maleo Disaster Averted

It could have been devastating for the endangered maleo birds who come to nest at the large Tompotika nesting ground that AIto has been helping to protect since 2006. Last July, AIto staff were shocked to find land newly cleared just a few hundred meters from the maleo nesting ground. The plan? A new coconut oil factory, which would have brought noise, traffic, and inevitable disturbance to the birds.

Fortunately, being around since 2006, AIto has gotten to know not only the maleos in the area, but also the local government officials. AIto staff immediately alerted government leaders to the dangers of siting the new factory near the nesting ground, and within a week, a promise was secured that the factory would be relocated. Sure enough, the factory is now under construction at a distant site safely removed, and the maleos' environs can revert to natural vegetation.



July, 2010: This site is being prepared for a new coconut oil factory. The maleo nesting ground is only a few hundred meters to the rear of this photo.



Same site, November 2010



The Faces of AlTo: Meet our U.S. Board

The Alliance for Tompotika Conservation / Aliansi Konservasi Tompotika--called "Al-To" for short in both Indonesian and English--is an international partnership of a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization in the United States, and a registered *Yayasan* non-governmental organization in Indonesia, governed by Boards of Directors in both countries.

We introduced our Indonesian Board in the June 2009 newsletter--now it's time to introduce our U.S. Board. AlTo makes its U.S. base on Vashon Island in Washington state's Puget Sound, where, amongst a population of only about 11,000 people, the pool of highly committed, experienced, and skilled conservationists is unbelievably large! Collectively, AlTo's U.S. Board members have literally hundreds of years of experience working with conservation efforts and non-profit organizations. AlTo's U.S. Board is, (left to right, above):



Yvonne Kuperberg (Treasurer), *Environmental Activist*

John Rupp, *Marine Biologist, newly retired Curator of Aquatic Collections, Pt. Defiance Zoo and Aquarium*

Ellen Kritzman (President), *Retired Mammalogist, Slater Museum of Natural History*

Dr. Jack Barbash (Vice-President), *Geologist, U.S. Geological Survey*

Rayna Holtz (Secretary), *Reference Librarian, King County Library System*

Together with our Indonesian Board members, the folks pictured above are responsible for steering the course for AlTo's efforts and helping to make it all happen. They generously volunteer their time and expertise to do this, and AlTo couldn't exist without them. We are enormously fortunate to have them as part of the team!



Alliance for Tompotika Conservation

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