

AITo Update May 2010: World Turtle Day May 23

Dear Friend of the Alliance for Tompotika Conservation (AITo),



May 23rd is World Turtle Day. In honor of the occasion – and because we always love an excuse to tell Tompotika stories! – [please join us Sunday afternoon, May 23, 3-5 pm at the home of Susan and Jim McColley, 21419 - 86th Ave SW, Vashon Island, Washington, USA.](#) This is just an informal gathering – a chance to hear, for example, how organic farming in Tompotika is helping save sea turtles, why maleo birds are becoming celebrities, and see photos of waterfalls and wildlife that live in the new Tompotika Forest Preserve. The event is free and all are welcome, refreshments will be served. For questions or directions, contact Marcy (contacts below).

Meanwhile, **May is a peak month for sea turtle nesting in Tompotika.** It's not all good news: sea turtles in the Asia-Pacific region have been on the decline for decades now, due above all else to overharvest of adult turtles and eggs by humans. Although in Tompotika AITo has been working with local villagers since 2008 to protect them, we have not yet seen an increase in the number of female sea turtles who, at this time of year, laboriously haul themselves up on the beach to dig a hole and lay their eggs.

Until 2008 – and despite the fact that it's illegal – pretty much every sea turtle nest that people could discover in Tompotika was dug up, and the eggs were taken for sale or consumption. **The number of green, hawksbill, olive ridley, and leatherback mothers who've returned has declined, steadily and relentlessly.** In fact, it may already be too late for the leatherbacks – they haven't been seen nesting in the last few years. **But it's not too late for the others.** And now, the tide is turning, and sea turtles have a new chance at life in Tompotika, thanks to AITo's partnership with local villagers to protect them.



It's going to take time. Sea turtles may take 20 years or more to reach sexual maturity – that means that baby turtle hatchlings that we protect this year won't come back to nest until around 2030.

It's going to take faith: faith in the strength and resilience of natural processes – that if left alone, sea turtle populations can recover. Faith that some semblance of natural beach – likely at higher sea levels – will still be there in Tompotika when those turtles do come back 20 years hence. Faith that people can and will change their ways and attitudes toward sea turtles and all nature. Happily, there are plenty of reasons behind this faith: in Tompotika, we have already seen critical changes in people's attitudes and behavior. And in other parts of the world – the Caribbean, for example – we have seen that when nesting beaches are protected, sea turtle populations really do eventually recover.

It's also going to take work. We know what we need to do, but doing it will not be easy. Nor will there be a single turtle who will have an easy way ahead. It's estimated that, after 20 years of predators, floating plastics, fishing by-catch, and the like, only one of every thousand turtle hatchlings will live to return to her natal beach for nesting. But in Tompotika, every time we watch a newly-laid egg drop into its sandy nest—a nest that, for the first time, will be protected and allowed to hatch—we think: *I wonder if it's this one.* With your help, it may be.



Happy World Turtle Day on May 23rd! We hope to see you.

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