

**AITo Update December 2014:
What Maleos Teach Us About Parenting, Trust, and the World We Live In**

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

Right now, in the month of December, it is the height of the maleo nesting season in Tompotika.

Here is how the story goes. The male and female maleo, whose home is in the native Tompotika rainforest, leave home to travel many kilometers to reach their nesting ground. It is their natal nesting ground--likely used by generations of their grandparents and great-grandparents ahead of them. The maleo mother is heavy with her one gigantic egg--it's six times the size of a chicken egg, for a bird whose body is of similar size. So they travel slowly, on foot. Then, when they reach the nesting ground, the maleo parents spend many many hours digging, trying to find just the right place for their egg. They dig here, they dig there. Other maleos are doing the same. The males tend to squabble with one another quite a bit, while the females just keep working [I am not making this up, just reporting ;-)].



A Maleo pair at the main Tompotika nesting ground.
Photo: Kevin Schafer

Finally, when they feel that the time and place is just right, the mother maleo quietly lays her one enormous egg in a deep pit in the sand--and then the two parents get to work to cover it up again. When they have buried the egg under a meter of sand, they simply leave the nesting ground and go back to the forest. Their part is done. The egg will be incubated by the sun's warmth in the sand. (And thanks to your help, in Tompotika it will no longer be dug up by humans and sold as a souvenir).



Nearly ready to lay the egg. Photo: Kevin Schafer

It is the ultimate act of hope and trust. The maleo parents invest everything they have in this ritual. They give their one huge egg plenty of energy and time--the chick will take about 80 days to hatch--and take great care to get it started in the right place. But when that chick hatches, the parents will be long gone. The chick will hatch fully feathered, able to fly and search out its own food and forest home, if such forest and food remains to be found. The parents will never do anything to help it get along in the world. Maleo

parents surrender all control, give their eggs the best start they can, and then simply trust the world to be friendly enough for their children to make their way in it on their own. Their own legacy, and that of their entire species, rests on that trust.

It's a profound inspiration for us humans. To us, maleos offer an invitation and a challenge to fulfill their tremendous trust--to make sure that the world *is* friendly enough for a future, for maleos and for all. That is, if we humans can restrain ourselves from clearing the forests, from taking too many maleo eggs, from destroying the planet's life support systems, as we've been doing for so long, then we are saying to the maleo: "Yes, your trust is justified. The world is indeed a beautiful, friendly place, and your children will be okay." Isn't that what we *all* want to believe?

Maleos are living witnesses to the fact that we are not in control of our children's future--we must surrender that to the friendliness of the future world. But it is very much within our power to make the world a more friendly place for all, right now. In this season, we hope you will respond to the maleos' invitation, and do that, in all the ways that you can.

Thank you.

Marcy Summers
AITo Director



Newly hatched maleo chick. Photo: Sandesh Kadur

One practical, hopeful, and meaningful step that you can take toward making the world friendlier for maleos and all creatures is making a gift to AITo.

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Or send your check made payable to "ALTO" to:

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