



# Alliance for Tompotika Conservation Aliansi Konservasi Tompotika

NEWSLETTER

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## Tompotika Forests:

Stepping up our protection efforts in the face of new mining pressures

Nickel mining is not new to Tompotika. For decades, this special corner of the world has already been a modest source for nickel, used all over the world in stainless steel, batteries, and more. But here is the dilemma: for the sake of the climate, the world desperately needs to transition away from fossil fuels and toward renewable energies. But mining of many of the materials used in the energy transition, such as lithium, cobalt, and nickel, causes tremendous destruction of natural areas, biodiversity, and human lives, as well as huge carbon emissions.

With the recent dramatic surge in demand for batteries for electric vehicles, Tompotika's forests are now under unprecedented threat from a raft of proposed new nickel mines that could destroy villages, wipe out wildlife (including endangered and critically-endangered species), and leave those who remain in living conditions of misery. If not done carefully, there is a (continued on p. 2)



Sukendra Mahalaya

Far-reaching effects. Often concentrated on ridgetops, the destruction caused by nickel mining can destroy not only tropical forests, but nearby rivers and oceans, and much of the life, human and non-, that depends on them. On a recent fact-finding trip to neighboring Morowali regency (see p.3), the ALTO team saw many areas like this one newly opened for mining.

## The Beloved Maleo The good, the bad, and the beautiful

The last six months have marked a number of important milestones for Sulawesi's iconic mascot, the maleo bird, *Macrocephalon maleo*.  
World Maleo Day, November 21

On November 21, 2021, maleo lovers in Sulawesi and all around the world had their first chance to celebrate World Maleo Day, newly declared by the Indonesian government. In Tompotika and its gateway city, Luwuk—which is also the regency capital—events organized by the ALTO team and others kept a bright spotlight shining the maleo. "Maleo Goes to Campus" was a series of events at the local university, while ALTO staff were interviewed on a popular local radio show in "Maleo on the Radio." "Maleo on Facebook" blitzed social media, while "Maleo on Megatron" featured recorded speeches by dignitaries and maleo leaders (including ALTO Director Marcy Summers) at three locations for a week. "Maleo on the Road" made maleos unmissable on the streets, and a visit to ALTO's Taima-Libuun nesting ground by the wife of the area Vice-Regent, Ibu Halima, made a vocal maleo enthusiast out of her. To cap it all off, a "Maleo Love Letter" organized by ALTO and signed by over 1100 people from 61 countries showed that not only in Indonesia, but all over the world, people love the maleo bird and support its conservation.  
Uplisting to Critically Endangered

The World Maleo Day outpouring of support for this unique creature comes not a moment too soon. In December, 2021, the (continued on p.3)



Pandji Kresno

A message to the world. On World Maleo Day, citizens of Sulawesi took to the streets in support of their favorite bird.



Pandji Kresno

A new world record. On December 15, 2021, 118 adult maleos were counted at once at ALTO's Taima-Libuun nesting ground—up from our previous record of 108 birds in 2018, and more than double the number seen anywhere else for decades.



## New forest protection efforts (continued from p.1)

great risk that the transition to electric vehicles, which will be used largely by the Global Consumer Class, will come at the cost of the permanent destruction of biodiversity and poor human communities and a large spike in short-term carbon emissions.

The AIto team has therefore rapidly mobilized to respond to this new threat with accelerated efforts to win permanent protection for Tompotika's most critical areas of native tropical forest. Together with local village leaders, and with your support, we hope to facilitate creation of one or more new government-declared areas where forests are fully protected against mining and other threats, for the benefit of people, biodiversity, and future generations. The race is on—stay tuned! ~



Kevin Schafer

The Alliance for Tompotika Conservation/ Aliansi Konservasi Tompotika ("AL-TO") is committed to helping all of nature, including people, thrive. Our work is centered in Sulawesi, Indonesia—one of Earth's most unique biological treasure-houses. At the invitation of local communities, AIto forges partnerships to protect and restore imperiled species, tropical rainforests, and other natural ecosystems while supporting the dignity and self-sufficiency of local communities in a changing world.

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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## The first mining casualties: Teku sea turtles

It is with heavy hearts that we report that AIto has just ended our sea turtle conservation collaboration with Teku village. AIto will continue to protect sea turtles in partnership with other villages. Late in 2021, Teku elected a new village head, and at about the same time, a crushed-rock mining company based elsewhere in Sulawesi announced their intention to build a new mine and port to ship extracted materials out of Teku.

Within a few months, the new village head insisted that all required permits were already in order, and by the end of 2021, construction had actually begun. Teku residents report that mining company representatives have promised them prosperity with the new mine, and have already been handing out cash bonuses to villagers as a foretaste of expected profits. Yet, despite repeated requests, AIto has been unable to obtain copies of legally-required documents and permits, such as the environmental impact assessment (AMDAL).

Some villagers, including the *Karang Taruna* youth organization, have protested the new mine and the end of the conservation effort. We applaud them. But after consulting with our local allies, AIto has made the painful decision to withdraw from Teku; this is not a battle we can win. Should they wish it, we have offered to help the mining company make its new port as "turtle-friendly" as possible. 37,000 sea turtle adults and hatchlings were saved here; many of these are no doubt still alive. And AIto is now focusing our attentions elsewhere; at AIto's new Panganian site, for instance, turtle conservation efforts are stronger than ever. ~



Robin Moore

Protected no more. From 2008-2021, the Teku villager-AIto partnership saved more than 37,000 live sea turtle hatchlings and adults. Villagers earned wages for their work and reported a sense of pride in knowing they were safeguarding their own natural heritage and future.



Noval Suling



## A mine in our village: what are the effects?

With the recent nickel mining boom in Sulawesi, some of the proposed new mines are located in remote, forested areas, where destruction of rainforests could have devastating effects on biodiversity, natural systems, and people downstream. But others are being planned for right in the middle of existing villages, where their



impacts on human health and activities will be most direct. In February 2022, AITo sponsored a field trip for decision-makers in proposed mining areas to witness first-hand and talk with local people directly about the effects in areas where mines are already operating.

Four Tompotika village heads plus two AITo staff journeyed by car and ferry to Morowali and SE Sulawesi, where they visited numerous communities that have already been hosting mines for a few years or decades.

The group spoke with all types of citizens, including mine workers. Residents of mining-affected communities cited new influxes of cash into their communities, but many also felt that it came at too high a cost: only a few benefitted, and local residents' health and quality of life has suffered greatly. Nyoman, of Fajar Baru, says life



Toxic puddles. Nickel mining often produces toxic levels of Chromium Cr(VI), the so-called "Erin Brockovich" toxin, which causes cancer, respiratory ailments, and other problems.



"Do I have any choice?" Nyoman feels forced to move.

in his village is no longer tenable, and he wants to move somewhere else. "Since the mining company has operated here, we've had floods every single year. Water levels 3-4 meters high."

The trip made strong impressions on the Tompotika leaders that participated. Munawir Kunjae, Village Head of Sampaka, for instance, is now doubly keen to avoid mining and work with AITo to protect his forest. He advised his constituents: "Don't be dazzled by money... and bequeath disaster and misery to our grandchildren." ~

## Maleo News (continued from p.1)

International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), which publishes the definitive Red List of threatened species, officially up-listed the maleo from Endangered to Critically Endangered—the highest level of concern for a wild species. A significant proportion of the information used for this uplisting was provided by AITo's maleo research program; despite the bird's successful protection at a handful of sites, across its former range on the island of Sulawesi the maleo has suffered such drastic declines in recent decades that the uplisting is warranted.

### A New World Record!

All the more heartening, then, against the backdrop of decline elsewhere, was the news from our field staff on December 15, 2021: a new record 118 adult maleos were counted at once at AITo's Taima-Libuun nesting ground—more than double the number seen anywhere else in decades, and more than quadruple the maximum number seen when protection began in 2006. It's proof that Tompotika's maleos continue to thrive, and that community-based prevention of egg poaching and habitat protection works to recover the maleo.

### New Maleo Conservation Efforts

And there's more good news: taking their cues from AITo, a new local group has begun maleo conservation efforts in a neighboring province, protecting the entire nesting ground against poaching. "Like us, they too have the right to live and be protected," says one of the group's posters. We couldn't agree more! ~



"Stop taking maleo bird eggs" Drawing inspiration and some support from AITo, a new group, AKAT (Aliansi Konservasi Alam Towuti) is using AITo's habitat-based approach to conserve maleos in the Lake Towuti area in southeastern Sulawesi. Above, one of their posters.



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## The Faces of AlTo: Bryony Angell: Birder, Writer, and Parent

Most everyone knows a birder; in fact, many AlTo supporters are birders themselves. But what comes to mind when we think about a birder, or a birder's lifestyle? Bryony Angell is a second-generation birder, mother of two, freelance writer, health-care professional, and may not be whom you pictured. In one of her articles, Bryony writes, "birding is as much about the people as it is about the birds," and through her writing ([www.bryonyangell.com](http://www.bryonyangell.com)) Bryony is elevating and amplifying the voices of people from diverse backgrounds, who bring a welcome breadth and richness to the birding world. Bryony writes about women, parents, and other under-represented groups, all of whom share a love for birds and have unique and important contributions to make to birding culture and conservation.

Bryony lives in Washington State's Skagit Valley and was raised by parents who imparted a conservation ethic that has stayed with her throughout her life. "We are a piece of the biodiversity of this planet," Bryony says, "we share it with all these other organisms and they don't have the power to contest what we are doing. We have to care to have them around, it is a conscious choice." Bryony has been involved with non-profits since she was 13, volunteering her time, giving, and serving on boards. "The people that inspire me are the people that are doing the work. The leaders of these organizations have become friends and people that I admire tremendously because they are living it."

Bryony first found AlTo when reading an article in Bat Conservation International's magazine about a community in Indonesia who wanted help from the international community to protect their bats from bushmeat hunting. It was the appeal in the article that struck her because it was not about the organization, it was an organization giving a voice and agency to local people. "It was clear that it was the local community that was asking for this help." When asked why she supports AlTo, Bryony said "AlTo is an extremely effective conservation organization. It is so unusual to have a model that is lean, it is inclusive, it is kind, and it covers such a range of programming for how modest it is." As an articulate advocate for inclusiveness and kindness in her own work, we're proud to have Bryony as part of the AlTo family! ~



Courtesy photo

Bryony Angell makes conscious choices for the sake of non-human biodiversity. "We have to care to have them around."