



# Alliance for Tompotika Conservation Aliansi Konservasi Tompotika

NEWSLETTER

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## The Gift of Clear Vision

Partner village Toweer receives free reading glasses as a community benefit

Conservation is its own reward. In ALTO's partner villages, for instance, villagers who've helped the maleo recover from near-extinction take great pride in their role in saving their provincial mascot, while those who live near protected forests are safer from floods and landslides than those who don't. Still, as a kind of "thank you" for their participation in the conservation work, ALTO takes great pleasure in offering a variety of community benefits to our partner villages.

Residents of Toweer village partner with ALTO to protect sea turtles and the Kaumosongi maleo nesting ground (see story at right). Obtaining high-quality reading glasses in varied strengths and styles from US-based non-profit Restoring Vision, on 29 September ALTO sponsored a free eyeglasses distribution day. All village residents were invited to choose a pair of reading glasses in *(continued on p. 2)*



Galen Priest

"Hey, I can see again!" exclaimed one delighted villager. Said another: "I used to have to ask my daughter to help me pick through my rice [to clean it before cooking]. Now I can do it myself!"

## A New World Record:

### The Critically Endangered Maleo Keeps Increasing!

Nature needs only a little help to heal herself—and now that healing is greater than ever! In 2006, ALTO began working with local villagers to protect a communal nesting ground for the Critically Endangered maleo bird, securing their commitment to stop the widespread poaching of the maleo's large eggs—the primary cause of its dramatic population decline. Once the poaching stopped, the maleos knew just what to do, and today



Sandhy Bawotong

*Nowhere else in the world.* ALTO's maleo sites are the only ones fully protected in their natural state. The results speak for themselves: the birds continue to increase. Now, a new record of **199** Critically Endangered adult maleos have been counted at once at the Taima-Libuun nesting ground.

the Taima-Libuun nesting ground is, by far, the healthiest and most populous maleo site in the world.

In 2021, the ALTO team published a scientific paper documenting 108 adult maleos at once—a four-fold increase in maleos at the Taima-Libuun site—along with a three-fold

increase at our second site at Kaumosongi. But recent weeks have smashed that record, culminating on November 1, 2022, when **199 adult maleos** were counted at once at Taima-Libuun—**seven times** the maximum number seen in 2006. The week before, eight maleos (four pairs) were counted at Kaumosongi, where the maleo was perilously close to extinction when protection began.

The lesson is clear: engage local people to end the poaching of maleo eggs, and then let Nature do the rest. In facilitating local people's voluntary cessation of egg-poaching, and trusting in Nature's power to heal, the ALTO partnership has proven it: recovery of the Critically Endangered maleo is not only possible; indeed, it is happening, here and now! ~



Wiranto Abas

*The method works.* ALTO began protection of the Kaumosongi site in 2015, when a maximum of only one maleo pair was ever seen, and that, rarely. Now four maleo pairs may be seen nesting at once.

## Glasses (continued from p.1)

whatever strength and style best suited them.

The event was a huge success. 209 pairs of glasses were distributed, serving a majority of the village adults. Moreover, even many who did not need glasses came to choose a pair; it seemed everyone wanted a piece of the action! While the eldest villagers received the strongest correction, it was the lowest-strength lenses that were most in demand. The recipients' average age was 49, with 61% women, 39% men. "It's so clear!" grinned one woman in her new glasses. "And they're good-looking, too!" ~



Galen Priest

*Which line looks clear?* AITo staff member Vivi (right) helps a group of ladies test for the correct lenses. After years of declining eyesight, "It's great to be able to read again!" said one villager.

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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Noviyanti Burahima, age 16

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## Bats Are Thriving in Tompotika

Fruit bats, or flying foxes, sometimes get a tough break in our human-dominated world. These mammalian wonders, whose services as pollinators, seed-dispersers, and producers of fertilizer are essential for the health of tropical forest ecosystems, are nevertheless universally under-appreciated.

And then there was the revelation that bats hunted and brought to bushmeat markets have been reservoirs of viruses that led (via human activity) to diseases such as SARS and Covid -19. In some places, bats are thus coming under increasing persecution. It's not fair, and it's also stupid. Let alone the fact that bats, too, have a right to exist, we *need* them.

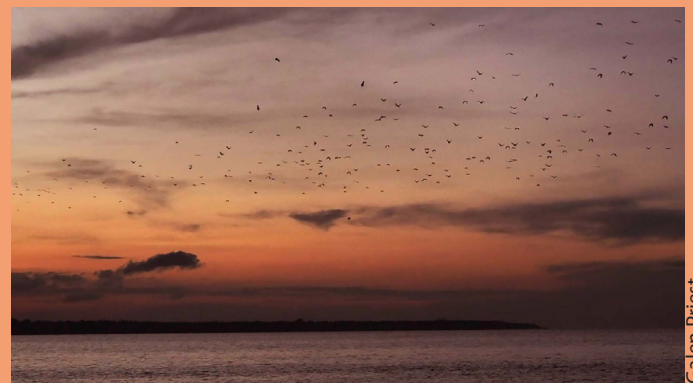
So we are especially pleased to report that in Tompotika, thanks to AITo's partnership with

Taima villagers, bats are appreciated—and thriving. Since 2014, key daytime bat roost-site Tangkuladi Island has been fully protected against hunting, and bat numbers there have burgeoned. Villagers are proud that their protected bats keep forests healthy for all, and don't give rise to diseases like Covid-19. "Good job, Taima," commented Tuti, a village resident. "Covid-19 didn't arise here, because we protect our bats." In this village, both sentiment and action are in accord with the billboard slogan: *Poniki Aman, Manusia Aman* — Safe Bats, Safe People! ~



Sandhy Bawotong

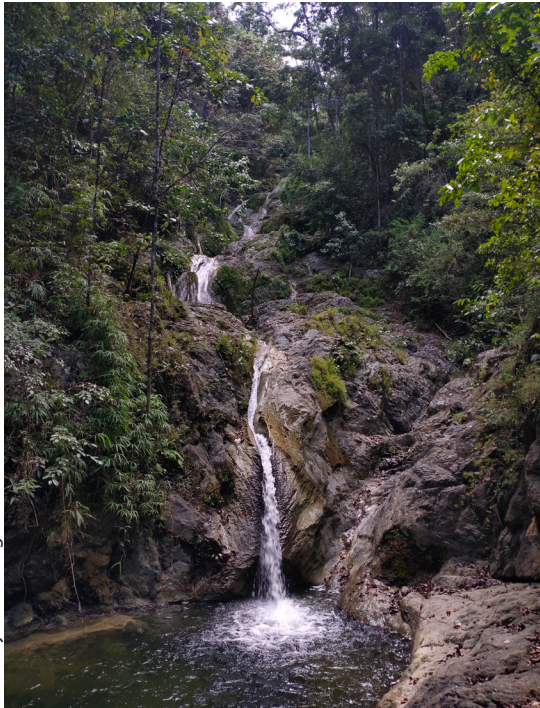
*Covid-19 didn't come from here, because we protect our bats.* A billboard congratulating Taima village residents for their bat protection efforts greets viewers in three locations.



Galen Priest

*A living river in the sky.* Every evening at sunset, thousands of flying foxes fly from Tangkuladi Island to the mainland to forage in—and maintain—Tompotika's tropical forests. At last count, over 14,000 bats of three main species were making the nightly migration.

# Protect the Forest: A New Initiative to Safeguard the Heart of Tompotika



Sandhy Bawotong

**A jungle paradise:** Gorgeous waterfalls like this one are common in the Heart of Tompotika forest.

There's really nothing more important. For slowing climate change, for protecting biodiversity, for preserving clean air and water, for preventing floods and landslides, for keeping human bodies and spirits healthy and happy... keeping tropical forests healthy and standing is an absolute must. On our ever more human-dominated planet, Tompotika's forests have always been under threat, but just in the last year or so, the huge spike in worldwide demand for nickel for electric vehicle (EV) batteries has suddenly and drastically sharpened the danger. Sulawesi is one of few places on earth where nickel can be mined, and a kind of "nickel rush" is now underway. If allowed to proceed solely according to the market's appetite for nickel and profits, it's likely to spell the destruction of all or part of Tompotika's irreplaceable primary tropical rainforests, and the people and wildlife who know no other home.

That's why, with funding support from the International Conservation Fund of Canada, Rainforest Trust, and IUCN Netherlands, AITo has recently launched a new, intensified effort to protect the Heart of Tompotika—the large, contiguous patch of primary forest in the interior of the Tompotika Peninsula. Working together with local villages, we aim to strengthen existing legally protected areas and help obtain official government protected status for key areas vulnerable to mining destruction.

As part of this new effort, it is essential to document the biodiversity present in the Heart of Tompotika, as well as the many and varied ways that local people traditionally relate to and use the forest. To that end, AITo

together with local partners has launched a series of expeditions into the Heart of Tompotika forest. At over 80,000 hectares (c. 300 mi<sup>2</sup>), much of the Heart of Tompotika is remote and rarely if ever visited by humans, but the area also contains many trails and landmarks known to local people in the villages ringing this forest.

Our first Heart of Tompotika expedition was in February, 2022; the second was completed last month. With a team of AITo staff accompanying to document the findings, a small crew of knowledgeable local woodsmen guide the group through various sections of the forest, pointing things out on the way: crush the roots of this plant for external wounds; boil that one for stomach trouble. We collect the sap of that tree for a resin, while the nuts of this one are tasty and marketable. The group also spot and document the biodiversity occurring in each place, including numerous rare species: anoa, babirusas, hornbills, macaques, cobras, butterflies, forest turtles, Giant Squirrels (see p. 4), and of course the maleo bird (see p. 1). In the time ahead, we hope to spell out clearly for government decision-makers: these forests are rich and irreplaceable for all creatures, and local people's lives are entwined with them in countless ways. The most promising future for the Heart of Tompotika lies not in nickel, cash, and destruction, but in conservation. In *life*, varied, ever-evolving, and abundant. ~



Pandji Kresno

**Medicine from the forest:** AITo partner Yudil Dilao puts a few drops of liquid collected in the tips of *bomban* leaves into his eyes to keep his vision clear.

## The Season for Giving

From now until December 31, 2022, your gift to AITo will be **DOUBLED** under our matching gifts challenge! Send in your check, or give online at: [www.tompotika.org](http://www.tompotika.org)

*Terima kasih ~ Thank you!*



Galen Priest



## World Maleo Day

**November 21**

The government of Indonesia has declared November 21 as World Maleo Day. Let's celebrate! Your support is helping this Critically Endangered species recover!



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## The Faces of ALTo: Sulawesi Giant Squirrel, *Rubrisciurus rubriventer*

Almost nobody other than Sulawesi residents has ever glimpsed one, and even lifelong residents of the island are unlikely to see one unless they spend a great deal of time quietly in the forest. Most people don't even know it exists. The Sulawesi Giant Squirrel, *Rubrisciurus rubriventer*, is rare, very shy, and ranked as Vulnerable to extinction by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Though very little is known about this creature—by either the scientific community or local people—we *do* know that it plays an important role in the forest ecosystem.

Local people who have seen this squirrel note its bright red coloration—lighter orange-red underneath darkening to deep maroon or near-black on its back—its glossy fur, and its very large size: like a cat, but with shorter legs, we're told. (And indeed, museum specimens reach nearly two feet [60 cm] in length, head to tail.) The Sulawesi Giant Squirrel lives in native primary Sulawesi forests like those ALTo is working to protect, where it is active during the day, running along the ground and in the shrubs and trees of the understory layer.

While Sulawesi forests are rich in fruit- and seed-eaters in the forest canopy—birds, monkeys, bats, cuscuses and others all feast on treetop fruits—the fact is that many fruits and nuts fall to the ground. But, thanks to the Giant Squirrel, they are not wasted—with its exceptionally strong teeth and jaws, it cleans up fallen fruits, and opens hard-shelled nuts and seeds inaccessible to other creatures. Though humans may be largely oblivious to its presence, this deep red phantom of the forest quietly plays its role in the woodland community, helping to keep the forest healthy, diverse, and vibrant with life.

The forests of Tompotika, so rich with countless life forms known and unknown to us humans, are of incalculable value for all life on Earth. With you, our local and international partners, ALTo is committed to doing all we can to save them. ~



The Sulawesi Giant Squirrel, *Rubrisciurus rubriventer*, is so rarely seen that almost no live photographs of the species exist. Illustration by Sandra Noel