



Alliance for Tompotika Conservation Aliansi Konservasi Tompotika

NEWSLETTER

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Learning the Birds: Birding and guiding training for ALTo staff

It's been said that birding is like a "gateway drug" for nature lovers: start with birds and, more often than not, the affair with all creation never ends! Birds are all around us and generally easy to see, so once you start looking and learning, there is always beauty, variety, and more to learn. But watching birds also serves as a great vehicle for simply learning how to better *pay attention* to the nature all around us, and to interact with it respectfully.

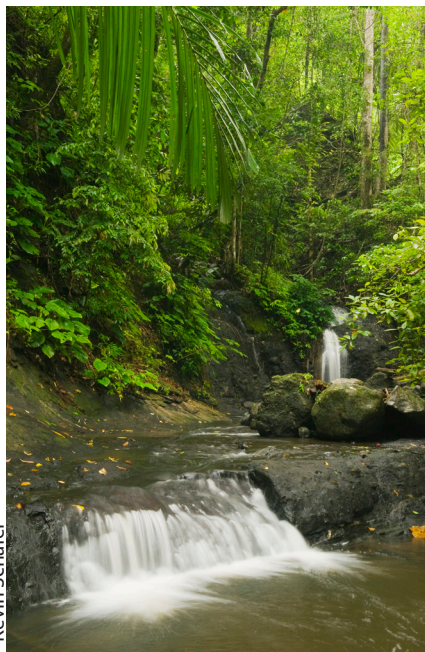
Last month, ALTo staff received the second-ever formal training in the theory and techniques of spotting and identifying birds. Our most senior staff members remember ALTo's first birding training in 2010, and many have become skilled birders in the interim, but there is always more to learn! And for most newer staff, this was their first birding how-to. ALTo staff are the future of *(continued on p. 4)*



Sandhy Bawotong

Male or Female? Sulawesi's Knobbed Hornbill (*Rhyticeros cassidix*) is sexually dimorphic—that is, males and females look different. This female shows the black (vs. buff-gold) head and yellow (vs. red) casque that distinguishes her from a male.

A New Forest Preserve: ALTo-village partnership proposes a new protected area in Tompotika



Kevin Schafer

For people and wildlife. The forests of Sampaka Village are where villagers and wildlife coexist—and, until now, both are healthy. The new preserve aims to preserve that healthy relationship in the face of mounting pressure from nickel mining.

mining boom, fueled largely by the skyrocketing demand for electric vehicles and other high-performance batteries. While the global "clean" energy transition is much needed, it is coming at a devastatingly high cost: continued overconsumption by Global Consumers, wholesale destruction of rainforests, and shockingly "dirty" mining.

Village Head Munawir Kunjaj of Tompotika's Sampaka village does not want to see his village's forests destroyed and life become untenable for his citizens. *(continued on p. 3)*

For many people in the Global Consumer Class, rediscovering the health benefits of forest bathing, or expounding the merits of rainforests for sequestering carbon, preservation of forests may seem optional—desirable, but optional. We think of forests in the context of "getting away," (from where we live), third-party certification schemes, or global commodities markets. For local Tompotikans living at forest edges, however, the forest is their direct source of life's basic necessities: air, water, food, livelihood. And for countless wildlife species, their very existence depends on healthy forests. As the recent extinctions of hundreds of known forest-dependent species worldwide attests, for many of Earth's non-human creatures, forests are not optional—they are a *sine qua non*.

But Tompotika's forests are in the crosshairs of the recent global nickel



Fachrudin Jabrig

"From when I was little, I've had a close connection with the forest." Sampaka Village Head Munawir Kunjaj has teamed up with ALTo to establish a new protected forest area covering most of Sampaka's land area.

AlTo's Tompotikan staff visit the USA

For about two weeks this summer, two of AlTo's Indonesian staff, Vivi Tan Oga and Adrianus "Sandhy" Bawotong, made their first journey outside of Indonesia with an AlTo-sponsored visit to the United States. Vivi and Sandhy are the fourth such team of AlTo's Tompotikan staff to make such a journey; staff that have been with AlTo for many years and who work on their English language skills can earn the opportunity as an employee benefit.

During their journey, Vivi and Sandhy visited parks, zoos, and natural areas, attended the scientific conference of the Ecological Society



Our first snow. Mt. Rainier in August: this snow has been around a while, but it's still the real thing!

of America, experienced homestays with American families, and, for the first time, were

exposed to a very different way of life than their own in Indonesia. What struck them? People in the US line up in orderly fashion; traffic is also orderly, though in the US more people drive cars rather than motorbikes as in Tompotika. There is little plastic trash on the streets and environment. And certain customs made them marvel. Hunting: allowed only during a specific season, and with a license! Potlucks: the host of a meal doesn't provide all the food! Farm stands: buy your vegetables on the honor system! Returning home, Sandhy said, "AlTo staff *must* work on their English. It's so beneficial to what we do." ~



Parks are protected. Vivi and Sandhy noted that in America, people pay to visit parks, and they are protected from illegal logging and other destruction.

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, AlTo 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.

AlTo 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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Ipan Djano

This newsletter is printed on 100% post-consumer recycled paper. Please let us know if you would prefer to receive it by e-mail.

Her Name is Athena, and She's Calling You!



Peter Dumwiddie

Athena was a conservation hero, and she invites you to be one too.

Back in 2006, a new conservation partnership called the "Alliance for Tompotika Conservation," or "AlTo," had newly been formed at the invitation of Tompotika villagers, who requested international

help to prevent the extinction of the maleo birds that nested in their village.

By coincidence, an adult female maleo, injured in a snare, fell into the hands of the AlTo team just as the new conservation effort was launched. Unable to be returned to the wild, Athena the maleo traveled with the team, captivating all who saw her and inspiring support for conservation all over Tompotika. Local people even named her burial spot "Athena's Place" and have protected it in perpetuity.

You can help carry on her legacy by joining Athena's Circle with a gift to AlTo of \$500 or more. Inspired by nature and community, the major commitment that Athena's Circle members have made provides essential core funding for all AlTo's work. And **this year, your new or increased gift will unlock a \$100 bonus.** Look closely: can you see Athena smiling? ~

A New Proposed Forest Preserve (continued from p.1)



Sandhy Bawotong

Food. Wild mushrooms are a forest staple.

For him, protecting the rainforests in his village's jurisdiction, and the long-term health and security that they represent, is much more important than the lure of a few years of cash from destructive mining. So, Munawir and his village leaders were keen to partner with AITo to propose that most of his village area—8400 ha (c. 32 mi²)—be declared a new protected area, a "Village Forest" under Indonesian national law.

With support from the International Conservation Fund of Canada, Rainforest Trust, and donors like you, AITo has worked closely with Munawir and Sampaka Village for over a year to navigate the proposal process, which is lengthy and involved. Under the enabling legislation, justification for the new Village Forest involves documentation of the biodiversity values of the area. AITo supporters will already have heard of maleos, anoas, tarsiers, hornbills, and myriad other rare species for whom the larger and as-yet-unprotected Heart of Tompotika forest—of which the new Village Forest is a part—is their irreplaceable home. The process also requires discussion of the ways in which villagers themselves interact with the forest; AITo and village partners have collaborated on a series of forest expeditions to learn and document the many ways that local people turn to the forest for nearly everything they need to live.

If approved, the Sampaka Village Forest will be protected by national decree, but managed locally by villagers with help from AITo. Forest-destroying activities such as mining and logging will not be allowed, but traditional uses of the forest will continue, at sustainable levels.

Sampaka villagers are pioneers. Following this project, more protected areas are planned: with our villager partners, AITo's goal is to ensure that as much of the 83,000 ha (320 mi²) Heart of Tompotika forest can be protected as possible. ~



Marcy Summers

Livelihood. Sampaka villager Yesaya earns what cash his family needs by sustainably collecting dammar resin in the area where the new forest preserve is being proposed.



Sandhy Bawotong

Beauty. "Man does not live by bread alone."



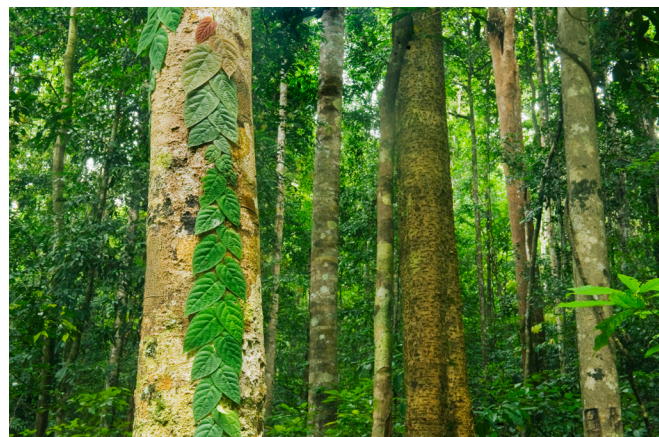
Pandji Kresno

Medicine. Ants' nests like this grow attached to forest trees; villagers chop and boil sections of them to treat a range of ailments.



Kevin Schafer

Water. Tens of thousands of Tompotika residents get their drinking water from this stream.



Kevin Schafer

Forest or Mine? The proposed new Sampaka Village Forest

It's Here!

The Sulawesi Giant Civet, *Macrogalidia musschenbroekii*, is one of Indonesia's most enigmatic and elusive animals. The largest mammalian predator in Sulawesi, this ghostly creature inhabits deep forest and is almost never seen, even by local people. And though documented in other parts of Sulawesi, it has never been confirmed that the species occurs in Tompotika. Until now.

In September, the AITo team found a carcass of this species deep in the Heart of Tompotika forest. The civet was dead of natural causes, but the identification was unmistakable. It's a wondrous creature, and its presence is one more confirmation: Tompotika forests are precious, and must be protected. ~



Duncan Neville

Birding Training (continued from p.1)



Vivi Tan Oga

Wetland and forests and shorelines, oh my! Tompotika offers a wide range of habitats—and thus a huge variety of birds—all within a short distance of AITo's base camp, Home Sweet Home.

conservation in Indonesia, so maximizing their education and love of all Nature will pay rich dividends in improving future conservation practice in this mega-diverse country. Along with the training, each staffer received a terrific new tool: with permission from the publisher and great work by US Board member Toby Ross, AITo has produced a new field-friendly, bilingual guide to the birds of Sulawesi, extracted from the authoritative *Birds of the Indonesian Archipelago* by Eaton, van Balen, Brickle, and Rheindt. "Wow, having this guide changes everything!" said one staff member.

Our trainers for the event were frequent AITo collaborators Nurlin Djuni and Allin Sawuwu of Malia Tours, a premier bird tour company based in Palu, Sulawesi. Nurlin and Allin covered the basics of birding: how to identify birds using shape, size, voice, color, field marks, behavior, and posture. But they also emphasized that Indonesia is the fourth biggest birding destination in the world; AITo staff are increasingly likely to use their birding skills while guiding visitors. Thus, Nurlin and Allin gave AITo staff tips not only on how to spot and identify birds themselves, but how to help others see and enjoy them as well.

There are challenges. About a quarter of Indonesian birds are threatened or nearly so, and many species are at grave risk from the wildlife pet trade. In Java, for instance, a booming interest in captive bird singing competitions is causing collapse of many wild songbird species across the archipelago. Internet-based birding sites, such as e-Bird, can unfortunately lead poachers right to birding hotspots. So, increasing knowledge and enjoyment of Tompotika's birds must be accompanied by caution, lest this increased knowledge lead to their harm.

The more they learn, the more AITo staff take joy and pride in their home place: not only is Tompotika home to the world's healthiest nesting ground for the iconic maleo, but it's also an enthralling place to see the diverse avifauna of Sulawesi, in all its wonder and beauty. ~



Jonathan Beilby

A male **Sahul Sunbird**, *Cynnis clementiae* (formerly Olive-backed Sunbird). Sahul Sunbirds will abandon their completed nest for about a week before the female returns to lay her clutch of eggs. No one knows exactly why.

WPA Does Maleo - and more!

On Oct 18-21, the AITo team hosted the largest group of international visitors to Camp Home Sweet Home and the maleo conservation area to date: 17 maleo lovers from the World Pheasant Association (WPA), which provides partial funding to support AITo's conservation efforts. These were a very knowledgeable and enthusiastic bunch: all aficionados of Galliformes, the family that includes pheasants, chickens, maleos, and similar birds.



Janina Kraemer

Great-billed Kingfisher, *Pelargopsis melanorhyncha*

In four delightful days, group members observed scores of critically-endangered maleos, yes; but they also spent time birding, photographing, swimming, snorkeling, meeting with village partners, eating great food, relaxing at camp, and, well... getting sunburned. Nothing's perfect. :-)



More vegetables, more variety:

AITo's community cooks learn tasty new vegetable dishes



Sayur pare kuah santan, bitter melon in coconut milk. (With chilis, of course!)

In the sixteen years since AITo established a base camp, Home Sweet Home, near the maleo conservation area in Taima village, cooking for AITo staff and visitors has made the fortunes of a number of local ladies who live nearby. Every day, the ladies receive word of which meals will be required, for how many people, and every day, they prepare and deliver tasty and nutritious vegetarian meals to feed the troops. The arrangement benefits everyone.

The main diet for most Tompotika residents is simply rice and fish, but local fishing grounds, like those in almost all of Indonesia, are desperately over-fished. The AITo team is committed to eating as plant-centered a diet as possible. Yet in rural Tompotika, produce supplies can be inconsistent, and most local cooks have limited experience of cooking with vegetables as the centerpiece.

So in September, AITo sponsored a private training. Three hours' drive away, our team knew of a terrific restaurant, or *warung*, run by *Ibu Mia* and three others; Mia's *warung* is a team favorite thanks to the great variety of excellent vegetarian dishes on offer. Would the *warung* ladies be willing to train a small group of cooks from Taima and other AITo partner villages? When Mia gave an enthusiastic "yes!", four AITo partner cooks—Dila, Ila, Vita, and Eti—spent three days learning a whole new repertoire of dishes.

The three days flew by rapidly. Mia and her helpers had a long list of new recipes to share: more than a dozen ways to cook tofu, tempeh, (both native to Indonesia and widely available), eggplant, squashes, leafy greens, jackfruit, papaya flowers, root vegetables, and much more. The AITo partner ladies, already skilled cooks, were delighted to expand their horizons. And throughout the cooking, learning, and getting to know one another, all eight women simply had a ball. On returning to their villages, Dila, Ila, Vita, and Eti eagerly tested out their new dishes, and AITo staff and visitors were only too glad to sample the results!

An obvious and immediate outcome of the cooking training is that AITo staff and visitors will now eat better. But we hope there will be other positive, if small-scale, effects: thanks to this training and the local buzz it generated, interest and demand for vegetables in rural Tompotika is growing. More demand for vegetables means new opportunities for farmers and gardeners to grow them, better nutrition for all who eat them, and incrementally less pressure on local fish stocks. A win-win-win-win for people, planet, wildlife... and of course, palate! ~



Marcy Summers

Infectious enthusiasm. Steve Sears loved people, teaching, and numbers. Here in Tompotika in 2014, Steve proves to AITo staff that even data sheets can be fun and exciting!

In Memoriam:

Steve Sears, AITo Data Manager

With the passing of Steve Sears on September 22, 2023, AITo has lost a valued team member and a treasured friend. A beloved former high school mathematics teacher, pastor of a local church, husband, father, and grandfather, Steve had a rich and busy life, spending just a few hours a week checking, managing, and analyzing the data AITo staff collect each day on maleos and sea turtles. Yet though it was but small, Steve always made it seem like his AITo work was a highlight of his week. No numbers dull or tasks tedious for Steve! He was always smiling, always positive, always expressing appreciation for his work. Though he died too soon, Steve was both blessed himself and a blessing to others; he felt deep and genuine joy in the people and life around him, and he expressed—and spread—it generously. Rest in peace, and thank you, Steve. Your example has taught us much more than just mathematics. ~



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The Faces of ALTo: Laurie Gano: Montana artist, rancher, and Athena's Circle member



Longtime ALTo supporter Laurie Gano is an artist and cattle rancher living in Montana, USA. Laurie's prized handwoven tapestries featuring the landscapes of Montana reflect her keen artist's eye for color and detail; lately she has turned her attention to quilting, including using batik fabrics from Indonesia. And for over 40 years, Laurie and her husband Dave have been committed to raising cattle in a way that cares for the land and the livestock, while preserving habitat for Montana's bountiful wildlife. When asked what about her background contributed to her decision to support ALTo, Laurie said, **"Contrary to what many people think, many of us involved in agriculture really are conservationists. We can see the connections between what people do and what happens to the earth because we are right there living in it."**

But Laurie's connection to the rainforest goes back to her childhood. "I lived in Equador for a year and a half when I was 13 and I have first-hand experience going into the rainforest. It made an impression on me because it was no longer an abstract concept. It was something I'd seen and been part of. **I heard years ago that if everyone who cared adopted 10 acres of rainforest, there would be enough people to keep it from being destroyed.** I heard about ALTo and thought that

sounds like the place I could do that, a way I can be a supporter. I feel so lucky that I have something I can contribute to that is worthwhile and accomplishing a lot."

For Laurie, the most important part of ALTo's work is its partnerships and relationships with the local communities of Tompotika. **"I feel like the thing that is really going to make it stay viable are the relationships between those who are trained in the field and the people who have lived there for generations.** If you bring a bunch of educated people in from a different part of the world and don't form those relationships it will last only as long as you have money to pay for those people to be there. I want to see it sustained. **That is what makes me feel so hopeful, that ALTo has these relationships and that they work at it. I think that's the key.**" Thank you, Laurie and Dave, for being part of the ALTo family and for working toward a brighter future for nature, both in Montana and in Tompotika! ~