



# Alliance for Tompotika Conservation Aliansi Konservasi Tompotika

NEWSLETTER

VOL. XX, NO. 1 MAY 2025

## Glimpsing the Shy Ones: Camera traps reveal rarely-seen forest denizens

Charismatic wildlife is not just cool and fun to watch on nature shows—it is essential to the health of forest ecosystems. In order to remain healthy, forests need wildlife that disperse seeds, eat leaves, pollinate, fertilize, and more. But many of Tompotika's large vertebrates have become rare from over-hunting and habitat loss. Many of these creatures are naturally shy and difficult to spot; now with diminished populations, how can we monitor how they are faring? Enter camera traps. In a new initiative, ALTo (*continued on p. 2*)



**An unguarded moment.** This endangered Anoa approached the mud-wallow cautiously, then kicked up his heels before plunging into the mud for a delicious wallow, all captured on film.

## SPECIAL ISSUE: FOCUS ON THE FOREST



Kevin Schafer

## Protecting the Heart of Tompotika: A many-sided effort to conserve the forest

It's as simple as this: the Heart of Tompotika Forest is the lynchpin around which the community of all life in the region revolves, human and non-human alike. For human residents of Tompotika, it's where their water and their air come from. It's what keeps their microclimate cool and moist, what prevents flooding and landslides, what provides the materials from which they get food, shelter, and livelihood. It's what gives beauty to their views, meaning to their culture, and a backdrop to every aspect of their days. For the people of Tompotika, life without the forest is simply unimaginable.

And for plants, non-human animals, and other life forms of Tompotika, well... life without the forest is not only unimaginable, it simply wouldn't exist. The Heart of Tompotika Forest—about 800 km<sup>2</sup> (300 mi<sup>2</sup>) of native rain-forest blanketing the interior of the Tompotika peninsula—is the sole home range and native habitat of many thousands of wild species. This includes at least 21 officially Threatened or Endangered species that just can't live anywhere else. Maleo birds, sea turtles, flying foxes, Anoa—virtually all the imperiled species that ALTo works to conserve would be lost without the forest. In short, the health and extent of the Heart of Tompotika Forest is a matter of life and death for all manner of native lives on land and sea, including humans. In this issue, we highlight a few of the many ways that your support enables ALTo to protect and defend the Heart of Tompotika Forest.

### Achieving Formal Protected Status

The largest share of the Heart of Tompotika Forest is land owned by the Indonesian national government and managed under (*continued on p. 3*)



## Camera traps (continued from p. 1)

has partnered with experts including Dr. Agus Jati (see back page) to install a network of camera traps that automatically take short videos when triggered by the movement of an animal in their field of view.

The new cameras have already given us excellent views of a wide range of creatures, from Anoa and Maleos to macaques and tarsiers. Over time, this will allow us to monitor the status of rare species, and assess the results of our conservation efforts. And whereas before, we'd seen only tracks and droppings, the cameras reveal entire animals in their natural state. With these images, perhaps we humans will be changed: not only our eyes will thrill at these marvelous creatures, but our hearts will be moved more strongly to protect them. ~



*What is this thing?* Curious younger members of a troop of Tonkean Macaques check out the camera, installed on a tree, while an older matron looks on from behind, unimpressed.

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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## Protection through Purchase: AlTo's Panganian Nature Preserve

For certain key parcels of forestlands currently owned by individual private landowners, the only way to achieve robust, enduring protection is to purchase it outright. For the lands surrounding the Maleo nesting ground at Panganian, Pangkalaseang village, this is AlTo's strategy. These lands are critical for connecting nesting grounds to large

*"I trust that selling land to AlTo is a good decision. Nature will not be destroyed, forests will be protected, and we the community also will benefit."*

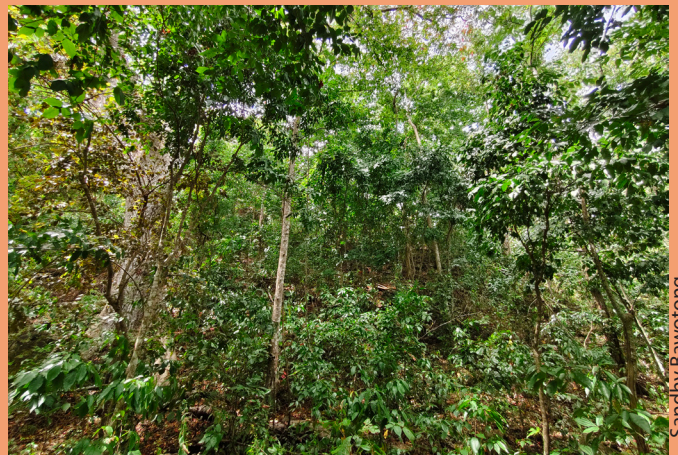
*-Rahmi, landowner*

areas of interior forest. Since 2019, with funding support from IUCN Netherlands and others, AlTo has purchased 101 hectares (250 acres) of such lands—mostly in 1-2 ha parcels—from 65 separate landowners. To accomplish this, there has to be a great deal of com-

munity support, and almost all landowners in the area have to agree to sell. The stakes are high: mining companies also are angling to buy these lands.

"I know what AlTo is," says landowner Rahmi (52). "I trust that selling land to AlTo is a good decision. Nature will not be destroyed, forests will be protected, and we the community also will benefit," she affirms. In the coming months and years, AlTo hopes to purchase more of these lands, gradually growing the Panganian Nature Preserve. We're pretty sure local wildlife approve of the plan.

And so do local people. As Abdul (55), says, "To sell to industry? I don't want to... but to sell to AlTo, I want to! The price is good, too. And later it won't be developed, it won't be ruined by AlTo. I even heard AlTo plans to return it to forest. Forest is good for our community. Nature is protected. The air is clean and fresh. Maleos and other wildlife are also protected. They need a home, too! The important thing is, I support AlTo protecting the forest of Pangkalaseang!" ~



Sandhy Bawotong

*A private preserve with strong community support.* The 101 ha (250 ac) of land that AlTo has purchased so far in Panganian includes forest like this—habitat for Maleos and other forest wildlife—and sandy beaches, where sea turtles nest.



## Protecting the Forest (continued from p.1)

the control of the Forestry department. AITo aims to help achieve formal protected status for as much of this land as possible, utilizing a combination of different legal mechanisms such as Village Forest (*Hutan Desa*) and Great Forest Park (*Taman Hutan Raya*). Though they vary in the details, all of these varieties of protected status include provisions for local involvement in decision-making and management. Proposals for protected status have been submitted, and more are underway. Meanwhile, AITo is also at work organizing local people to patrol and steward the Heart of Tompotika through our community ranger team, *Montora*.

### **Montora Community Forest Rangers**

Organized by AITo and established in 2024, the *Montora* community rangers are a team of 12 local Tompotikans who

know the Heart of Tompotika Forest well and are committed to helping protect it. Through regular patrols, rangers serve as the "eyes and ears" of the forest, alerting authorities to poaching, illegal logging, and other problems. All former poachers, they now turn their forest skills to protection, not destruction, and their pride in this new role is evident. It's a win-win for all: rangers, authorities, and the entire community of Life. ~



**At home in the forest.** Three *Montora* rangers take a break to collect water in carriers they fashioned from bamboo.

Sandhy Bawotong

## Addressing the threat of new nickel mines

Since the market for Electric Vehicles began to boom a few years ago, and nickel is wanted for their batteries, much of eastern Sulawesi has been under assault from a "nickel rush" of scores of new, dirty mines. Nickel mining here means stripping all vegetation and topsoil from large swaths of land, destroying forests, polluting water and air, causing erosion, landslides, and floods, and creating social problems such as increased income inequality, tension with imported workers, inflation, theft, and prostitution. And Tompotika is in mining's crosshairs, with more than a dozen new mines in review or already permitted.

But many of these are not yet operating, and it is not too late. AITo has identified multiple legal violations that may be used to help prevent the worst mining outcomes, and we're educating and empowering local communities about their rights. Opposition to mining is growing. As one man said, "Forest means a comfortable life... Green and fresh! Mining?...Barren. Our environment will be wrecked. I'll oppose it to the end!" ~



**What forests are being sacrificed for.** This Tompotika nickel mine has only just begun operations. Unless plans change, the permitted area into which it may expand is much, much larger.

Stephanie Broekarts

## PALs for Nature: *Pahlawan Alam Lestari* club members are future forest heroes

One of AITo's longest-running and most popular outreach programs is our school-based Conservation Awareness Campaign, wherein AITo staff bring interactive outreach programs about nature and conservation to schoolkids of all ages. But through this program, which reaches virtually all children in Tompotika, we discovered that some kids want to go deeper. How does a kid with a passion for nature find ways to follow and deepen that passion? AITo's PALs (*Pahlawan Alam Lestari*, or Nature Conservation Heroes) club is one answer.



PALs began in November 2024, and is led by experienced educator Maryati Abiduna (far left, photo below). Middle-school aged PALs kids meet after school for learning, creative, and service projects all related to nature and conservation, such as forest hikes and tree plantings, study and observation of Maleo birds, poetry-writing and conservation games. Through PALs, AITo hopes to nurture joy in and knowledge of nature in more young people. The future care and stewardship of the Heart of Tompotika Forest will be in their hands. ~

**PALs club, Sampaka Village.** Concerning forests, Maleo birds, and much more, PALs kids are curious and adventurous nature-lovers.



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## The Faces of AlTo - Agus Jati, PhD: a "powerful weapon to change the world" for nature



As a small boy growing up in Central Java, Agus Jati was fascinated by animals of all kinds. He brought home stray cats, begging his parents to let him care for them, and made a habit every morning before school of trying to catch the bats that roosted under his roof-eaves. Adults forbade him to interact with snakes, which only made him more drawn to them. Once as a teenager, being forced to miss the airing of a David Attenborough nature special on TV put him in a blue funk for days. When he came out of it, he realized that nature was his passion.

Agus excelled in school, got his bachelor's degree in Forestry in Jogjakarta, then worked for a timber company in Borneo. But he was disillusioned by the unsustainable practices he saw; profits, rather than a concern for forests, seemed to be his employers' main motivators. Still, he himself continued to act on his love of wildlife. He saved a cobra from being killed by villagers, and then received a near-fatal bite while

playing with it ("I was overconfident," he says). After a stint at Indonesia's Taman Safari wildlife park, he left to pursue a master's degree in Kyoto, Japan. Last year, Agus completed a PhD at University of Maine, studying the Togean Babirusa of Sulawesi—research in which AlTo supported him by providing field assistance. In his own life's journey, Agus embodies a favorite quote from Nelson Mandela: "Education is the most powerful weapon to change the world."

Returning home with his advanced training in conservation, Agus is in demand for government and other positions, but "I'm a very idealistic person," he explains—he's being very selective about what he gets involved in. While he advocates for rigorous science in Indonesian government policy, Agus' sheer delight in nature also always shines through. In recent months, Agus has teamed up with AlTo again to assist in setting up camera-trap monitoring for wildlife of the Heart of Tompotika Forest (see p. 1). He likes working with AlTo: "AlTo is at the frontline of conservation. I'm very impressed by how AlTo involves local people in conservation—I haven't seen other institutions involve locals in that way." Agus' message for the AlTo team? "Please protect what you are doing now... keep doing it." This means, in part, continuing to collaborate with top-notch scientists and passionate nature-lovers like Agus. AlTo plans to do exactly that. ~