



Alliance for Tompotika Conservation Aliansi Konservasi Tompotika

NEWSLETTER

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Now even more special: Another brand-new species found only in Tompotika!

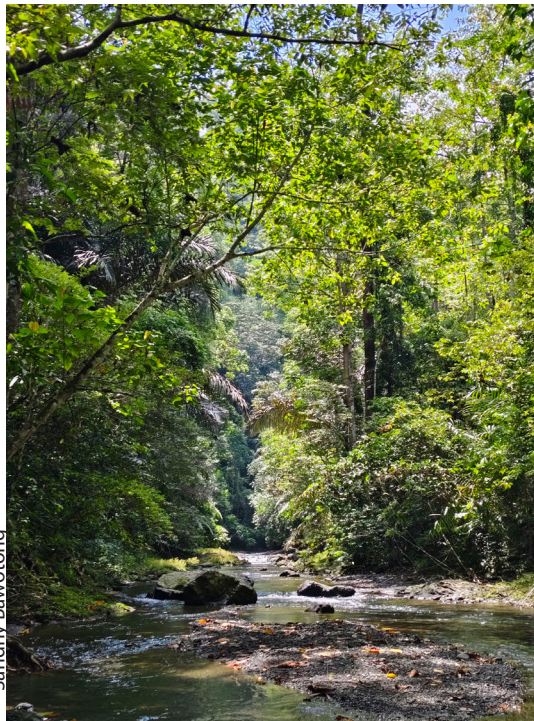
The importance of tropical rainforests for the health of planet Earth are well known: among other things, they stabilize the climate, produce oxygen, regulate the water cycle, prevent flooding and landslides, and provide a home for countless plants, animals (including humans), and other living things. The Heart of Tompotika Forest, about 80,000 ha (300 mi²) in the interior of the Tompotika peninsula, is the major home and source of life for untold thousands of living species, most of which we are only beginning to get acquainted with.

And now, with scientists' discovery of a new species of Spiny Rat, *Crunomys tompotika*, the number of known species has just increased by one—this one found *only* in Tompotika and nowhere else on earth. Like a handful of other endemic species known only from Tompotika, the new Mount Tompotika Spiny Rat underscores how critical it is that Tompotika's forests be protected to prevent extinction. *(continued on p. 2)*



***Crunomys tompotika*.** The new species, the Mount Tompotika Spiny Rat, is known only from Tompotika, and has helped to spur a revision of its genus' entire family tree. Illustration by Harsi Parker.

New Protected Area Declared! Government approves *Hutan Desa* protected forest in ALTo partner village



Sandhy Bawotond

Something for everyone. The new *Hutan Desa* protected forest includes miles of untouched rivers and rainforests in outlying areas, as well as conservation-friendly agriculture and other zones near the village.

declare as much as possible of the forest above their village as a *Hutan Desa*, or officially protected Village Forest area.

The application process was very complicated and lengthy. Many types of additional information were requested. The area we proposed was made significantly smaller. Large teams of officials from Jakarta had to make multiple visits to our region. But in the end, the news couldn't be better: Sampaka's application for a new *Hutan Desa* Village Forest protected area has been officially *approved*! This means that 4,018 ha (9,929 acres / ~16 mi²) of the Heart of *(continued on p. 2)*

"If there is a common welfare, a common good, it is forest ecosystems."

The truth of this observation, by American conservationist Joel Kuperberg (who also happens to be the late husband of ALTo US Board member Yvonne Kuperberg), is hard to overstate. Healthy forest ecosystems benefit *everyone*—human and non-human alike, now and, importantly, into the future. And ALTo's long-time partner village, Sampaka, knows it. That's why, a few years ago, Village Head Munawir Kunjae and a long list of other village residents began working together with ALTo to prepare an application to Indonesia's central government to de-



Sandesh Kadur

Great and small. The new *Hutan Desa* provides protection to an enormous array of life.

New *Hutan Desa* protected forest (continued from p.1)

Tompotika Forest in Sampaka village's jurisdiction will be protected for 35 years, the maximum time allowed.

Crucially, the new official *Hutan Desa* status will strengthen village residents' efforts to prevent the area's conversion to a nickel mine, which was permitted by the central government without their prior information or consent. A mine would not only destroy vast swaths of forest upslope of their residences, making their entire village vulnerable to flooding and landslides, but would also likely contaminate the forest stream from which fresh water is piped to thousands of households in villages below. A few villagers have been lured by promises of quick cash from mining companies: "I can just sell my land and leave." But for most, it's a no-brainer: a forest is not just a better neighbor than a mine, it's part

of their home. "The forest protects us all," said one villager. Or as another said simply, "This is my place. I stay here."

The new *Hutan Desa* will protect and support many lives, and many dimensions of those lives. All manner of wild creatures, including those newly (see p. 1) and yet-to-be discovered. People of various stripes, including farmers growing forest-friendly crops like nutmeg and cloves. Harvesters collecting candlenuts, rattan, or wild honey. Rangers to patrol it against illegal activities. And a new cohort of green-thumbs employed to help restore degraded areas of the forest (see p. 6). All these and other *Hutan Desa* activities will help protect and restore the land, making Tompotika's forest and its human neighbors *healthier*, rather than destroying it as with mining. In establishing the new *Hutan Desa*, Sampaka Village has chosen *life*. AlTo is honored to be their partner. ~

Stephanie Broekarts



Nature's Bounty. In addition to protected forest areas, the new *Hutan Desa* includes zones for restoration activities and forest-friendly agriculture—like harvest of this *kemiri* or candlenut.

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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"If there is a common welfare, a common good, it is forest ecosystems"

- JOEL KUPERBERG

Brand-new species! (continued from p. 1)

Compared to similar species, the new Mt. Tompotika Spiny Rat is a forest dweller of medium size, with big ears, a long, slender body, and short, dense fur with "spiny" guard hairs. Very little is yet known about its ecology or habits, but we hope future research will help us learn more about this diminutive neighbor.

With your support, AlTo will continue working to protect Tompotika's forests. In so doing, we protect all manner of strange, beautiful, astonishing, and mysterious creatures. We're delighted to meet you as one of them, Mt. Tompotika Spiny Rat! ~

Sandhy Bawtotong



Keeping AlTo strong, today and tomorrow

Recently, you should have received AlTo's annual year-end appeal letter, asking for your support. All the work you read about in this newsletter is

possible only because you care, and you give. Please consider a gift both to AlTo's Annual Fund—empowering conservation today—and to the Forests Forever Fund—to ensure that our achievements today will endure for the long term. Terima kasih ~ Thank you!



JOIN US IN TOMPOTIKA!

The March for Maleo, November 2026

Your Help is Needed!

Curious about tropical forests, Maleo birds, and the people and stories you read about in this newsletter? Want to help directly, with your own two feet? Like music, drama, and working with others from different backgrounds and countries?

Join us in Tompotika November 15-22, 2026 for the international **March for Maleo (Kirab Maleo)**, a cross-cultural celebration of the Critically Endangered Maleo bird, the tropical forests they call home, and the people who love and protect them. Together with local Tompotikans, visitors from the international community will **march 73 km over six days. Our route will skirt the edge of the critical forest habitat walked by Maleos themselves** every time they travel from the Heart of Tompotika Forest to the Libuun nesting ground to lay an egg.

Why a March for Maleo? Why Now?

On World Maleo Day, 21 November 2026, we celebrate 20 years of the AIto-villager partnership protecting the Libuun Maleo nesting ground. During that time, Maleo numbers have increased 7-fold. The nesting ground is secure. But when not at the nesting ground, Maleos live in the nearby Heart of Tompo-



Michael Henier

Marching for Maleo. In 2007, AIto sponsored a short Maleo parade with schoolchildren. Some of those kids have now grown up to be strong conservation advocates. The 2026 March for Maleo will be larger and longer, including more arts activities and deeper involvement with villages along the way.

tika Forest, in which they range widely to find food, water, and others of their kind. This Heart of Tompotika Forest, a rich tropical rainforest that has stood healthy for thousands of years, is now threatened with destruction by nickel mining driven by overconsumption amongst the Global Consumer Class. **In the March for Maleo / Kirab Maleo, people from many corners of the globe will come together with Tompotika villagers to declare, with our feet, a big "YES" to preservation of this forest for the long term, and "NO" to its destruction.** In villages along the way, we'll make merry with AIto's regular Festival activities, celebrating the Maleo with music, games, art, and drama, and raising awareness about what's at stake. We'll end our walk on World Maleo Day, with fanfare and plenty of media attention.

The Details

Space is limited. Please let us know of your interest as soon as possible.

- **Dates:** Nov 15-22, 2026 (8 days)
- **Book your flights to and from:** Luwuk, Central Sulawesi, Indonesia
- **The March:** from Balantak to Bualemo, total 73 km (45 mi), average ~12 km (7.5 mi)/day. We'll rest during the hottest part of the day, and you need not carry any luggage.
- **Accommodation:** Comfortable tourist-grade accommodation is available for limited numbers.
- **Cost:** USD \$1850, not including airfare. Financial aid and cost-saving measures may be available.

For more information about taking part in the 2026 March for Maleo, send an e-mail to Ezra: ezra@tompotika.org



Keith Brofsky



Map: Ezra Parker

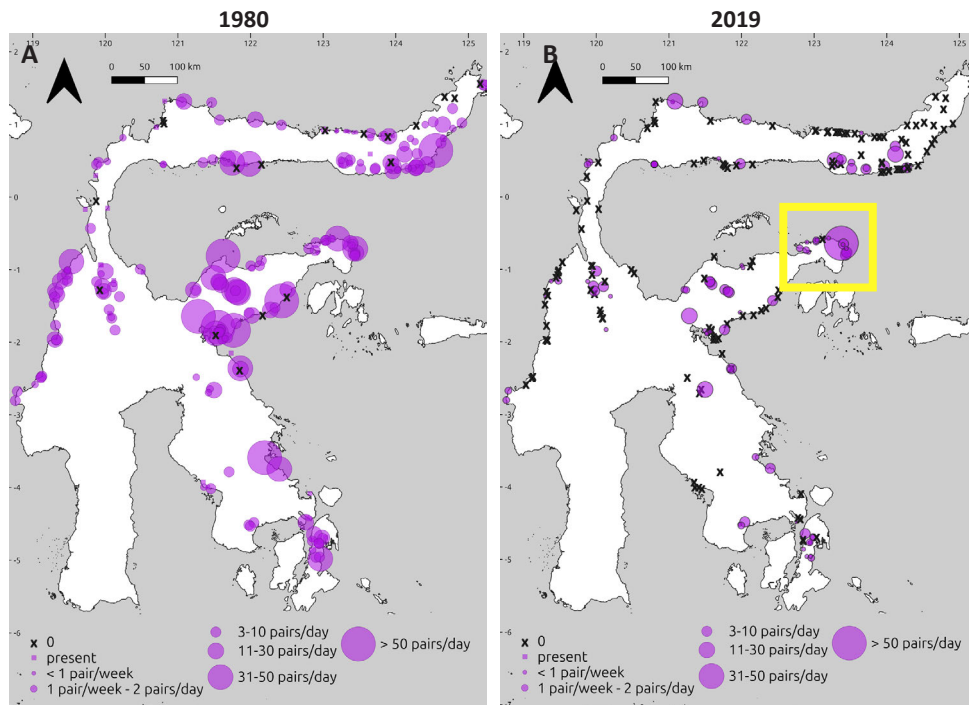


— Heart of Tompotika Forest ★ Libuun Maleo nesting ground
— March for Maleo route ● March for Maleo villages
— Roads

0 5 10 Miles
0 5 10 Kilometers

Massive Declines and Local Recoveries:

Newly-published AITo research reveals the status of Maleos rangewide



Maleo Nesting Grounds, 1980 and 2019. The first-ever comprehensive survey by the AITo team enabled a historical reconstruction and documentation of the Maleo's severe rangewide decline. Dot size is proportional to the number of Maleos hosted at that nesting ground, X means no Maleos. But where egg-taking has ended, such as at AITo's site at Libuun, Tompotika (yellow box), the species has made dramatic recoveries. Libuun is now the world's healthiest and most populous Maleo site.

now either entirely empty of Maleos or hosting no more than two pairs per day (see figure).

But the first range-wide survey of all known Maleo nesting grounds has also given us important insights. Our analysis showed that the taking of their eggs by humans is the number one cause of the Maleo's decline, (continued on p. 5)



Courtesy photo

"I got an upgrade!" AITo's Field Program Manager Pandji Kresno's three months at the Durrell Conservation Academy in Jersey, UK gave him new skills, new perspectives, and a new network of conservation colleagues from all over the world.

Pioneering conservation education:

Pandji completes professional conservation training course

"It was so cold, I felt like I got frostbite!" exclaimed AITo's Field Program Manager Pandji Kresno, describing his arrival last February in Jersey, UK, for the Durrell Endangered Species Management Course (DESMAN). The prestigious 3-month course trains 12 young conservation professionals from around the world in the fundamentals of conserving threatened species. The experience was made possible by a partial scholarship from the Durrell Academy, special support from a group of generous donors, and months of hard work improving his English on Pandji's part. Pandji is a pioneer: we hope, with his success, that many others of AITo's Tompotikan staff—few of whom have had any opportunity for higher education, let alone in conservation—will be inspired to work toward their first professional training, from conservation planning to genetics, GIS to speaking skills.

"My thought is deeper now," Pandji says. "I learned a lot of things we're already doing, but before, I didn't know why we do it." He's also glad of his new network of international colleagues, from Mauritius to the Philippines. But, he jokes, "they're jealous, because AITo has great management. I've got really good support," while some students did not feel in sync with their employers. Now back on the job, Pandji's "new perspective" makes him keener than ever to take conservation action. And Tompotika's future looks ever brighter. ~

The cover of the August 2025 issue of the world's top-ranked ornithology journal, *Ornithological Applications*, features a Maleo photo by wildlife photographer and former AITo board member Kevin Schafer, and spotlights the latest research published by the AITo team. The paper presents the first comprehensive report on the history and current status of Maleo populations throughout the species' entire range across Indonesia's island of Sulawesi: Summers et al., 2025: *Massive declines and local recoveries: First range-wide assessment spotlights ending egg-taking as key to the survival of *Macrocephalon maleo* (Maleo)*. Sadly, the overall news for this Critically Endangered species is not good: Maleos have experienced drastic declines in the last few decades, with 85% of the 228 known once-healthy Maleo nesting grounds

Maleo declines and recoveries (continued from p.4)

followed by degradation of the forest corridors linking nesting grounds to large swaths of forest habitat. The good news is that if human egg-taking is the main cause of the Maleo's decline, then ending egg-taking could spark a recovery—and this is exactly what the ALTo partnerships have achieved in Tompotika. Protecting existing forest habitat is likely enough, if combined with ending egg-

taking, to support Maleo recovery at many of the remaining nesting grounds.

To that end, the ALTo team is committed to doing all we can to help support the creation of new Maleo conservation efforts in other parts of Sulawesi. According to our research results, these are more likely to be effective if eggs are protected and left in place at the nesting ground—

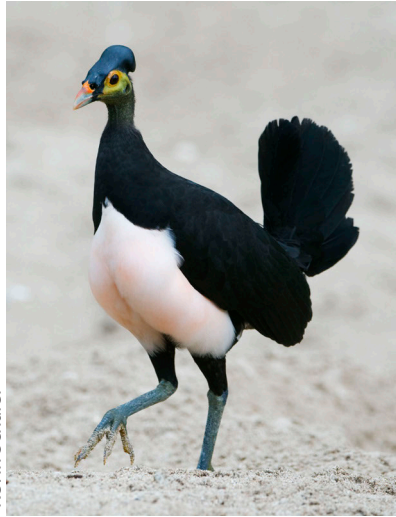
we call it the "Respect for Nature" approach— rather than digging them up and relocating them to a hatchery, which is the more common method. As ALTo has found, the Respect for Nature approach also lends itself well to strong community involvement in the conservation effort, which brings additional powerful and enduring benefits for both Maleos and people.

With three Maleo nesting grounds protected through ALTo-community partnerships—all of them increasing—the Tompotika region is a critical stronghold preventing the extinction of Sulawesi's iconic mascot. With Respect for Nature as a proven successful model, the task now is to spread that approach beyond Tompotika. We now know

where best to target those efforts. As ALTo's work has shown, it is not too late! Range-wide recovery for the Maleo is possible, and within reach. ~



Responding to pressure. The team found evidence of Maleos adapting to human egg predation: at some sites, despite other spots providing better incubation temperatures, Maleos choose to lay eggs under rock overhangs and in crevices, where natural predators like monitor lizards can still reach them, but humans cannot.



Kevin Schafer



Pandji Kresno

Tompotika Sea Turtles in 2025: More live hatchlings, more Hawksbills!



Sandhy Bawotong

New sea turtle hatchlings make their dawn rush to the sea.

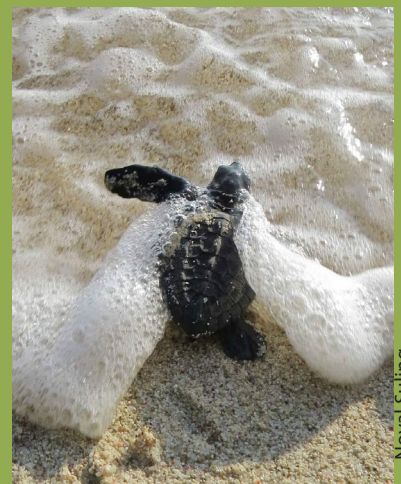
The 2025 sea turtle season marked the first full year of ALTo's collaboration with sea turtle experts Chráníme mořské želvy z.s. (CMZ), the Save Turtle NGO of the Czech Republic. And both the humans and the turtles seem quite happy about it!

Climate change poses a challenge: with more and more rain during the sea turtle nesting season (Feb-July), developing eggs run a higher risk of failing to hatch due to excessive moisture in their

sandy nests. But with CMZ's help, this year we created retractable hatchery "roofs" to divert some of the rain, and the results are positive: higher rates (71.5%) of live hatchlings! In 2025, thanks to these conservation efforts, a total of 4,625 baby turtles from 63 nests escaped poaching and made it to start their new lives in the sea.

A further exciting result in 2025: increased numbers of Critically

Endangered Hawksbill Turtles. Although all Indonesian sea turtle species are in peril, of the three Tompotika species—Olive Ridley, Green, and Hawksbill—the latter is in most dire need of help. With four successful nests this year, we're encouraged: there is yet hope for the Hawksbill! ~



Noval Suling

A new Olive Ridley life begins.



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The Faces of ALTo: Yuli and Riyal, growing organically



It seemed the perfect match. As part of ALTo's commitment to the new *Hutan Desa* protected forest area (see p. 1), and a new partnership with Missouri Botanical Garden, we determined to establish a new nursery to maintain and restore native forests and important crop plants, and to train a pair of Sampaka village residents to run it. Thanks to ALTo's long-standing collaboration with The Learning Farm (TLF), an organic farming training program on Java, we knew how to get them trained. Thus, Yuli Kunjae (22) and Riyal Kunjae (21), who happen to be cousins and buddies, were selected by their village to attend TLF's 5-month residential training program. What Yuli and Riyal would learn at TLF was not only just the right organic horticulture skills they'd need to run the new nursery, but it would also help them gain important life skills valuable to any young person. And when they graduated, full-time nursery jobs with ALTo would await them.

And so, a bit nervous but eager for a "new experience," Yuli and Riyal set off for Java—the first time away from home for both of them. Their days at TLF were full and structured. Each student had their own patch to plant and tend. For Riyal, the best part of the organic farming training was the harvest: "Wow! I grew those vegetables! And I could sell them at Indomaret!", while Yuli's favorite part was tending her patch: pruning, adding compost, ensuring no pests. But their learning also included skills like computers and English, and "how to be a 'strong youth': responsible, being brave to try new things, learning discipline in time and work, integrity and being honest in working with a team." There were surprises: for one thing, at TLF, men and women were treated the same, which was not what they were used to. But both came to appreciate the values they were taught. For Yuli and Riyal, working with plants and organic methods is 100% new, but they both like their new calling. As one speaks, the other nods. "Trash can become fertilizer! The vegetables are healthier. It's friendly to the environment. And our land can become more and more fertile." Now, they feel fortunate to have jobs working for ALTo: "We just want to apply what we've learned, and give our best." ~