



# Alliance for Tompotika Conservation Aliansi Konservasi Tompotika

NEWSLETTER

VOL. XXI, NO. 1 APRIL 2026

## The Inimitable Babirusa: Imperiled by deadly ASF, Tompotika is still a safe haven

Sulawesi, Indonesia is known for being home to an astonishing array of the weird and the wonderful—animals and plants found nowhere else in the world, many with distinctly odd features. One of the most notable of these is the babirusa—"deer-pig" in Bahasa Indonesia—which does indeed look a bit like a cross between a deer and a pig. On the males, however, huge baroque tusks curve up out of the jaw and all the way back to the forehead—a look unlike that of any other creature on the planet.

Shy, sensitive to disturbance, slow to reproduce, and threatened by overhunting, the babirusa has already long been classified as Vulnerable to extinction by the international authority, IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature). But just recently, an additional tragedy has stricken members of the pig family worldwide: African Swine Fever (ASF), which swept across (continued on p. 3)



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**A very rare occurrence.** Sulawesi's elusive babirusa, never common, was already imperiled before African Swine Fever wiped out most of its populations. But they're still safe in Tompotika, where the ALTO team has been overjoyed to catch healthy babirusas in our camera traps.

## Beyond Protection: Restoring forests for imperiled wildlife



Phil Lou

**Ready to plant.** ALTO staff Yuli (L) and Dina (R) bring native tree seedlings from ALTO's nursery.

Since 2019, ALTO has been quietly creating a new private nature preserve in Tompotika. Now totaling over 127 hectares (313 acres) and still growing, the Panganian Nature Conservation Area contains nesting grounds for the Critically Endangered Maleo bird, sea turtle nesting beaches, and essential habitat for other threatened species such as Tonkean Macaques and tiny primate tarsiers. Importantly, the Panganian preserve also links ALTO's protected coastal nesting areas with interior forest several kilometers away, forming an essential, continuous corridor for Maleos and other wildlife to access the habitat needed for all stages of their life cycles. Its lands purchased from willing local landowners, ALTO's Panganian preserve is perfectly located to maximize the conservation benefits of a new protected area.

Yet although Panganian's nesting areas are intact—and now protected by ALTO—not all of the Panganian preserve is in great condition. Parts of the new preserve are former plantations, now long-abandoned but regrown in weedy brush. In order to improve the quality of Panganian's habitat for Maleos and other wildlife, careful restoration of native forest is needed.

Now, thanks to expert assistance from scientists from Missouri Botanical Garden, New York Botanical Garden, Case Western Reserve University, and others, that restoration is underway. Last year, ALTO sent two staff for special horticultural (continued on p. 2)



Phil Lou

**Whatever it takes.** ALTO partner Yudil climbed huge trees to obtain seedlings of fig (*Ficus*), a key species for forest wildlife.

## Panganian Restoration (continued from p. 1)

training in Java, and established the beginnings of a native plant nursery in which suitable tree species could be reared and prepared. Sourcing seedlings of a variety of native species directly from Panganian's environs, over the past months Yuli and Riyal have cared for these seedlings until, in February, just before the start of the rainy season and in a celebratory group work day, the team put them in the ground.

The new young trees will need careful tending: watering, removing encroaching weeds, and keeping the area's hungry free-roaming cows away... but the AlTo staff stand ready. The recent plantings are also only a first sally—the initial core of what will be an ongoing restoration effort spread over many hectares and years. As it is now, the Panganian preserve provides a safe place for wildlife—a refuge free from

human hunting or disturbance. But with this restoration, in the years to come it will become so much more: native fruit trees for Sulawesi's myriad frugivores; tall roost trees for Maleos to rest at night; deep-rooted species that reach the water table and help others survive the dry season; aged trunks with room for holes for cavity-nesters. With each seedling that goes in the ground, such is the vision inspiring the AlTo team. Stay tuned! ~



Phil Lou

*Forests for the future.* AlTo staff Wiranto (L), Pandy (R), and Riyal (photo at R) plant native trees at AlTo's Panganian Nature Preserve.



Phil Lou

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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Wikel Wijaya, 12

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## Babirusa (continued from p.1)

Europe, arrived in Asia in 2018, and onto the island of Sulawesi in late 2023. Though apparently harmless to other animals (including humans), the virus is so deadly to members of the pig (suid) family that mortality rates approach 100%. Areas with an active domestic pork industry have been particularly hard hit, and as yet there is no vaccine. As the virus has spread, babirusa populations in northern, west-central, and southern Sulawesi have vanished, and a rapid uplisting to Critically Endangered—the last step before extinction in the wild—is being considered. For the babirusa and other suids, these are dark times indeed.



Skull cast of an adult male babirusa.

Yet mercifully, so far no sign of ASF has been detected in Tompotika, which is somewhat isolated at the tip of a peninsula. The global fate of the babirusa currently hangs in the balance. But in Tompotika, its presence there simply adds one more resounding reason why protection of the Heart of Tompotika Forest is so critical, and why the ALTo team is more determined than ever to work for that. Beset on all sides, the incomparable babirusa—like myriad others—is depending on it. ~



October, 2025. One of ALTo's remote camera traps captures this pair of juvenile babirusas. The two are alert and wary, but *alive* and healthy.

M Summers

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## ETIKA: ALTo alumni form new activist group for forest conservation



2015. As a cast member in ALTo's Festival drama, Andika's character boldly defended nature. He's still doing it.

In ALTo's 2015 Festival drama, Andika Saluki, then 16, played a young hero who saves endangered Maleos from greedy bad guys. It seems the role stuck. But whereas in 2015 Andika was playing a part in a high school drama, now his role is very much in earnest.

Since 2014, ALTo's biennial Tompotika International Maleo and Sea Turtle Festival has celebrated Tompotika's natural heritage with three weeks of community events, including an original conservation-themed drama put on by Tompotika high school students. For many of these students, participating in Festival is a life-changing experience (see *Faces*, p. 4), opening their eyes to critical environmental issues in their homeland and building their skills and confidence as young actors raising awareness in their community about issues that matter.

For Andika, now 27 and an educator at a Tompotika primary school, the experience awakened a long-term concern for conservation. Recently, his growing concern about the threat from nickel mining led him to join with four friends to found an activist group focused on protecting Tompotika's forests. The group's name says it all: "ETIKA" is both short for *Ekologi Tompotika*, and the word for "ethics" in Indonesian. ETIKA's other major leader, Sam Solewali, is also a former volunteer at ALTo's Festivals. The group has now achieved formal recognition by the regency as a registered community organization.

Andika and the ETIKA team are playing a critical role in the fight against inappropriate mining in Tompotika. As citizens of villages directly threatened by mining, for them the stakes could not be higher. First asking ALTo's help in educating themselves about the importance of forests for healthy human and non-human communities, ETIKA members have gone on to hold meetings and door-to-door outreach in their villages to spread this information amongst their neighbors. At the same time, learning through visits to mining-affected communities, they're educating their neighbors about what's in store if mining comes to their villages. Working closely with ALTo's Mining Outreach team, Andika and the ETIKA team are the strongest possible ambassadors to speak to their own neighbors, and concern about mining is growing noticeably in Tompotika. Their efforts are not without risk: mining companies sometimes use surveillance and other intimidation tactics to discourage such community involvement and awareness. But Andika is undeterred. "We've had a good response.... When a farmer's rice field is destroyed for mining, 7 people lose their livelihood. When our source of clean water is polluted, we are all cheated.... People remember when deforestation caused flooding [in past years]. Let that not happen again." ~




2026. Andika, here with ALTo Director Marcy Summers, is now a respected leader of ETIKA, a grassroots group fighting deforestation and advocating for local community rights.

Keith Brofsky

Ahmad Nur



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### The Faces of ALTO - Dina SPEAKs



Amad Kalam

"When I was growing up, I was not very engaged with nature," says Achmadina "Dina" Kartyka, who recently joined the ALTO team based in Luwuk, Sulawesi, as our new Conservation Information Specialist (the job title nicknamed "SPEAK" from its Indonesian translation). Earlier, in 2018, Dina's teachers nominated her to be one of the dozen high school students that helped produce conservation-themed drama and community celebrations as part of ALTO's biennial Tompotika International Maleo and Sea Turtle Festival. The experience opened her eyes. "When I joined ALTO's Festival, everyone was so cool! ... It was a big thing for me. It gave me confidence, and I learned how to work with people. I learned that my voice matters." Through ALTO's Festival, she began to learn about and appreciate the natural wonders within her own region. "Why would foreigners care about our home, and us ourselves?" With this new connection to ALTO, Dina began to see things differently. "We are part of nature, and even very small actions matter, like saving electricity, and planting trees... Animals don't need fancy technology, they just need us to protect them."

After high school, Dina went to university, earned a degree in English Literature, and became a teacher. But when the new SPEAK position at ALTO

opened up last year, she was eager to work with ALTO again. Now she's a huge help in our Luwuk office, taking on a variety of tasks from internet research on government regulations to organizing ALTO events. In this position, she's been forced to step into new leadership roles that have stretched her, such as organizing the ALTO-sponsored Maleo art contest of World Maleo Day on November 21, 2025. "I never imagined myself doing this sort of thing, and it was hard work! But the other staff were so supportive... I was proud to be part of this organization, this Maleo committee." Dina says she's struck by "how great ALTO is right now. I'm just so happy for that." The admiration is mutual: Dina shines in her new role, and has already proven to be an indispensable part of the ALTO team. "I'm very positive about my job. I want to know more about nature and what we do... In this work, there are so many things that what I do really matters for others... One small step, many steps... I hope what I do now could mean something not just for the office, not just for my family, but for all." ~