



Alliance for Tompotika Conservation Aliansi Konservasi Tompotika

SPECIAL 20TH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

VOL. XXI, NO. 2 AUGUST 2026

20 years of AlTo!

It began with Maleo. But "people and nature healing each other" keeps on growing.

"No, the extinction of the Maleo is not what we want. *Ibu*, you know about such things. Will you help us set up some kind of conservation program to prevent it?" Back before 2006, these were the words that local villagers from the village of Taima, on Indonesia's island of Sulawesi, spoke to visiting conservation biologist Marcy Summers, after a meeting in which she pointed out that local extinction was the likely imminent result of their daily poaching of Maleo eggs at the local Libuun nesting ground.

The villagers' request led to a series of meetings and then a six-month experiment, launched August 1, 2006, in which local people voluntarily gave up poaching Maleo eggs while the newly-formed AlTo alliance supported them to instead help guard and monitor the birds while the eggs were left to hatch. The "experiment" was so successful that no one wanted to stop. And now, twenty years later, Maleo numbers at the Libuun nesting ground have increased seven-fold. Where other sites for this Critically Endangered species continue to decline toward extinction, Libuun instead has recovered, hosting more Maleos than any other nesting ground in the world.

Again at the invitation of local villagers, the AlTo-community partnership model, and our "Respect for Nature" approach, in which eggs are not moved, but are protected and left in place to hatch naturally, has since been replicated at two other Tompotika Maleo nesting grounds: Kaumosongi and Panganian. There, Maleo numbers have also



The world's healthiest nesting ground of the Critically Endangered Maleo. When the AlTo-villager partnership began in 2006, this nesting ground had four birds on it.



increased 10- and 4-fold, respectively.

The Alliance for Tompotika Conservation / Aliansi Konservasi Tompotika ("Al-To") international partnership thus began with the iconic Maleo as a "flag-ship," but in 20 years has grown and matured to encompass a variety of pathways and programs through which, in this small but globally-significant biodiversity hotspot, the relationship between people and the rest of nature is healing. Imperiled species are recovering. New protected areas are being declared. Kids are learning about and exploring their natural heritage. Wildlife laws are being enforced and respected. Degraded places are being restored. People are choosing quality of life for all over profit for few. Beauty and wonder are being celebrated. In the following pages, we report some of the achievements that your support for AlTo has made possible. Please keep it coming—there is much more to do!

Thank you.

Maleos in crisis. Rangewide, the beloved Maleo, Sulawesi's mascot, is in steep decline, due to the taking of its eggs by humans and destruction of its forest habitat. Local artist Fadillah Hamid's painting (left) is entitled, chillingly, *Song of the Last Maleo*. Thankfully, in Tompotika, this song has not been sung! Through the work of AlTo-community partnerships, Maleos are instead **increasing** in Tompotika.

About AlTo



Our Mission

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.

Our Working Principles

I. We're Part of Something Bigger:

Human beings, all created equal, are only one part of the Family of Life. Non-human life is inherently good and precious, regardless of any utility to humans.

II. Quality of Life:

We do not regard increased wealth, possessions, or technology as ends in themselves; lower-tech, less expensive, and simpler may be better. We seek to enhance the *quality* of all life on Earth.

III. Go Deep, Do it Right:

We strive to listen to each other, give voice to the voiceless, and act from unity. Cultivating trusting relationships, long-term commitments, and lasting changes, we measure our success across lifetimes rather than budget cycles.



Galen Priest



IV. Still Learning:

We gain insight through both science and traditional knowledge, while endeavoring to overcome our anthropocentric bias. Although the most important drivers of change may be the hardest to measure, and ultimate outcomes are often beyond our control, we trust the integrity of good process.

V. We're All in This Together:

To learn greater respect for nature and each other, we need a diversity of perspectives and an attitude of humility. We honor the bonds of the people of Indonesia to their homelands; they have a deep love and special knowledge of their wild neighbors. We also value the strength and wisdom that spring from the inclusion in our enterprise of a range of nationalities, backgrounds, and personalities. In this spirit, we all share the challenge and the rewards of becoming better Earth citizens.

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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Novianti Burahima, 16

Expanding protection of forests and natural areas

While some species, like Maleos, also require specific conservation actions to address threats like poaching, many others—from sunbirds to fig trees, mayflies to pandans, geckoes to orchids—are best conserved by simply carefully and firmly protecting the habitats in which they occur. In fact, protecting high-quality habitat—especially in Sulawesi's tropical forests—is one of the most significant "no regrets" conservation actions possible. In Tompotika, this requires two things: legal protection to provide the authority to manage the place for conservation values; and a team of people with boots on the ground, making sure that such management is actually being carried out. Neither of these two things, by itself, is sufficient to ensure lasting protection: the first alone results in "paper parks" that may be ignored, while the second leaves management actions ever vulnerable to sudden challenges or "bigger fish" who may take or destroy the land for other purposes.

Thus, since our beginnings the ALTo team has

worked to establish formal government-declared protection for Tompotika's most important natural areas. To date, the ALTo team has facilitated the establishment of six new officially protected areas in the c. 2000 km² (800 mi²)

Tompotika peninsula, totalling 7585 ha or 76 km² (18,743 ac or 29 mi²). These are: the Taima Essential Ecosystem (40 ha); Tangkuladi and neighboring islands (1200 ha); Mantawa and neighboring islands (950 ha); the Teku coast (1250 ha); the Sampaka Village Forest (4018 ha); and the Panganian Nature Preserve (currently 127 ha). While the first five are mostly public lands now with official government protected status, the last is a private preserve owned by ALTo. In most of these locations, ALTo is actively present to ensure conservation management.

When new protected areas include some degraded lands, undertaking restoration activities can also reap great conservation

rewards. At ALTo's Panganian preserve, such restoration is now underway, and promises to greatly enhance the habitat for Maleos and other wildlife.

But perhaps ALTo's greatest current efforts are aimed at achieving legally protected status for the c. 80,000 ha (200,000 ac) Heart of Tompotika Forest; this is the only way to protect Maleos, humans, and other creatures from threats like mining and deforestation. Long-term protection of natural areas is a priceless gift—one we aim to give ourselves, our fellow creatures, and future generations. ~



*"...My forest is whispering softly ...
Begging and pleading
I ask: on my knees I beg and plead.
Let the voice of my forest
Reach the ears of those with power
Reach the hearts of those
Who can save it..."*

*- Lady Khartiono,
Local educator & poet*



Unsurpassed global significance. Sulawesi is widely recognized as a global "hotspot" of biodiversity, even more valuable for conservation because its species are, very often, found nowhere else in the world. Above, a few examples of these species, all found in Tompotika. L to R: Bear Cuscus (photo Meldy Tamengge); Half-banded Viper (Kevin Schafer); Wallace's Stripe-faced Bat (Martin Mandák); Red-knobbed Hornbill (Adarsh Raju); Tarsier (Robin Moore). Few places in Sulawesi host the full complement of the island's major endemic wildlife species; Tompotika is one.

Building knowledge and love of wild nature

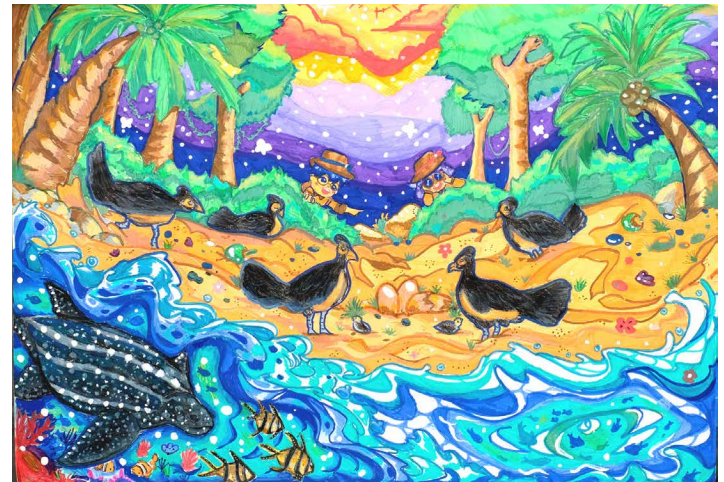
Outreach in schools, Art for Conservation

Starting in 2007, soon after the beginnings of our Maleo conservation work, AlTo began a Conservation Awareness Campaign in Tompotika's schools. Thousands of kids in over 120 schools have participated. These interactive events for schoolkids of all ages are very popular with students and teachers, and for many, represent the first time they've been invited to pay attention to the wild nature around them.

PALs for Nature. Middle school-aged kids in AlTo's *Pahlawan Alam Lestari* (Nature Conservation Heroes) clubs meet twice a month for field trips, hands-on learning, creative efforts, and service projects all related to nature and wildlife. Birding, anyone?



Many respond with curiosity and an inspiration to care. A hallmark of AlTo's outreach methods is that kids are invited not only to learn facts, but to respond to nature with artistic or other forms of personal or collective expression. Changing our behavior toward nature must be driven not only from the head, but also from the heart. ~



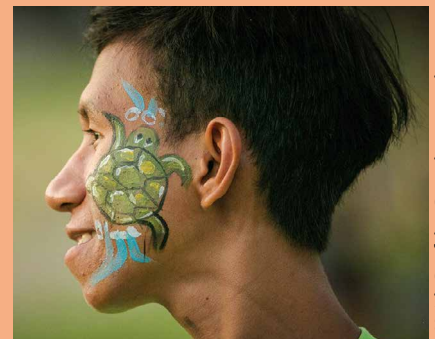
Expressing our love of nature. Since 2006, AlTo has sponsored hundreds of children and adults in dozens of projects creating music, drama, dance, literary, and visual arts celebrating nature and wildlife. Above: painting by Wilkel Whitley Wijaya, middle school.

Festival!

It began with just a youth drama event in 2014, but this was so much fun that Tompotikans clamored for more. A year later, the Tompotika International Maleo and Sea Turtle Festival was born. Now taking place every 2-3 years, Festival is a three-week celebration of nature, community, and the Arts. For each Festival, a company of Tompotika high school kids rehearses an original drama on a conservation theme important in the region, such as Maleos, oil palm, or human overpopulation. Then Festival goes on the road. At each of 6-7 villages, Festival day begins with booths, games, face painting, and the like—all on the conservation theme. Then in the evening, the kids perform their drama. Everything is free, and everyone attends: schoolkids and grandmothers, tough young men and moms with babies. People whoop, laugh, and marvel. We believe Festival is effective public education for conservation; we *know* Tompotikans love it. With a serious conservation message, delivered through an unforgettably enjoyable event, Festival is here to stay. ~



The time of their lives. Each Festival brings together 12-15 Tompotika high school kids who work, act, and travel together over three intense weeks. Many of them say that the experience changes their lives. Two Festival alumni are now members of AlTo's staff, and another co-founded a local environmental group for young people advocating for forest and wildlife conservation.



Acca

Keith Brofsky: R and center photos



Strengthening protection of imperiled species

At least 21 officially threatened and endangered species, and countless others besides, live in the forests and waters of Tompotika. Most of them live only in Sulawesi, some only in Tompotika. In partnership with local people, ALTo works to celebrate this rich and utterly unique natural heritage, and to find ways for people and wildlife to live harmoniously side by side. Over the past 20 years, critters as diverse as eucalypts and crocodiles, whale sharks and kingfishers, giant frogs and humans have all benefited. ~

Tompotika wildlife: weird and wonderful.
 ABOVE: Two juvenile babirusas captured in ALTo camera traps. Male babirusas have curling tusks that grow upwards, piercing their upper jaw. The babirusa is now so imperiled that it is confirmed from fewer than six sites globally.
 BELOW: The elusive, endangered anoa, a dwarf buffalo, looks charming, but can be aggressive. Upon the rare direct encounter, local people advise running to climb the nearest tree.



*"...I am a bat who inhabits the island...
 Oh, dear nature lovers...
 and people who understand, protect
 us from the calamities
 that are created by humans who
 have no mercy upon us...
 Someday we will all learn anew
 through hands that love us."*

—Warman Manasai,
 Tangkuladi landowner & poet

Tangkuladi Island: A haven for bats

Healthy bats ~ Healthy forests ~ Healthy people

Every day at dusk, thousands of fruit bats (flying foxes) of several species leave their daytime roost site on Tangkuladi Island to spend the nighttime hours foraging for fruits and nectar throughout the forests of Tompotika. In so doing, they keep the forest healthy: pollinating native trees and spreading seeds and fertilizer. They also pollinate human food crops, such as durian, mango, and avocado.

In 2013, overhunting had decimated the bats of Tangkuladi so much that even the few remaining bats had fled: the island was empty. ALTo worked with local landowners to end the cruel hunting and secure a long-term conservation lease for the island, with villagers patrolling. ALTo also facilitated a declaration of official protected status by the government. Since then, bat numbers have grown dramatically, with an estimated 50,000 bats now roosting safely each day on Tangkuladi Island.



Deepening community engagement with nature

Strengthening law enforcement

Since its beginnings, when Tompotika villagers asked for help from the international community, everything ALTo has done has been done in partnership with local people. Recognizing the need for greater understanding and respect for laws protecting nature, in the 2010s ALTo partnered with local village heads, government officials, and police on a series of workshops developing locally-appropriate procedures for crimes like poaching and illegal logging. Now in 2026, a network of aware, concerned authorities work in collaboration with *Montora*, the community ranger team ALTo has trained and sponsored, to patrol Tompotika's



The "eyes and ears" of Tompotika's forests and beaches. The Montora community rangers patrol natural areas and report problems to authorities. They also play an important role in their own villages as advocates for wildlife.



"I used to hunt everything: anoas, Maleos, hornbills... everything! Hunting was my art, my hobby. I loved being in the forest. But I stopped hunting in 2013, after I met ALTo and found out that these wildlife are protected, and threatened with extinction."

— Yudil Dilao,
Montora Community Ranger

forests and report problems. Since most are former hunters themselves, the Montora rangers know what routes poachers take, how to spot illegal snares, and in what seasons problems are most likely to occur. Now converted to conservationists, Tompotika's natural areas couldn't be in better hands.

Respect for laws protecting nature in Tompotika is growing. Since ALTo began shining a light on crimes against nature, smuggled Maleo eggs were confiscated for the first time; many illegally held sea turtles and other wildlife have been released; and the first case of illegal logging in the area has not only been prosecuted, but convicted. It takes time, but change happens! ~

The benefits of conservation

Conservation is its own reward. When communities protect forests, for instance, they're protecting the quality of their air and water, and preventing floods and landslides. And living alongside healthy populations of wildlife enriches human lives in ways that cannot be measured. When a survey asked residents of ALTo's partner Tower village what "benefits" they had received, if any, from partnering with ALTo in conservation efforts, one woman's instant response was, "Benefits? Why, they've brought back our Maleos!"

Nevertheless, ALTo also asks our partner villages what their needs are. As a gesture of thanks from the international conservation community for their efforts, are there

ways we can help? In response to their requests, ALTo has distributed over 1000 pairs of reading glasses and hundreds of children's books in our partner villages. We've sponsored repairs to community buildings, organic farming trainings, improved trash management equipment, and more. In identifying their greatest needs, Tower village was very clear: they wanted ALTo to sponsor a public statue of Maleos. So proud they are of their Maleo recovery, their greatest "need" is to tell all the world! ~

Enhancing the quality of life for humans. The community benefits ALTo provides for our partner villages have included eyeglasses, a Maleo statue, books for kids, and more: all in response to villagers' requests.



Galen Priest



MSummers

Gaining knowledge and wisdom

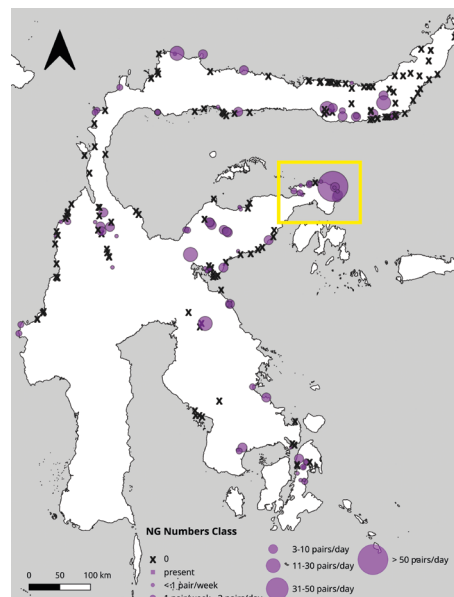
Scientific research, traditional knowledge, and skills training



Sandhy Bawotong

Now we'll recognize her as an individual. AlTo staff Vivi, Marcy, and Pandji place colored bands on a female Maleo. AlTo research suggests that Maleos may not mate for life, as previously assumed.

On the AlTo team, our nature learning takes many forms. To learn where the hornbills congregate, or which forest plants will ease childbirth, there are no better teachers than local people; the more we spend time together, the deeper our understanding. There is also a role for science, and the insights we gain from careful research and study. And for our Indonesian staff, basic skills like instruction in English or computers are also enormously helpful in helping connect us to the worldwide conservation community. When the subject is nature, learning is an endless adventure! ~



The AlTo team has so far published four research papers in top-ranked scientific journals. Despite their range-wide decline, in Tompotika (yellow box), Maleos show an unparalleled increase. (Source: Summers et al. 2025. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ornithapp/duaf022>)

Growing our team and organization



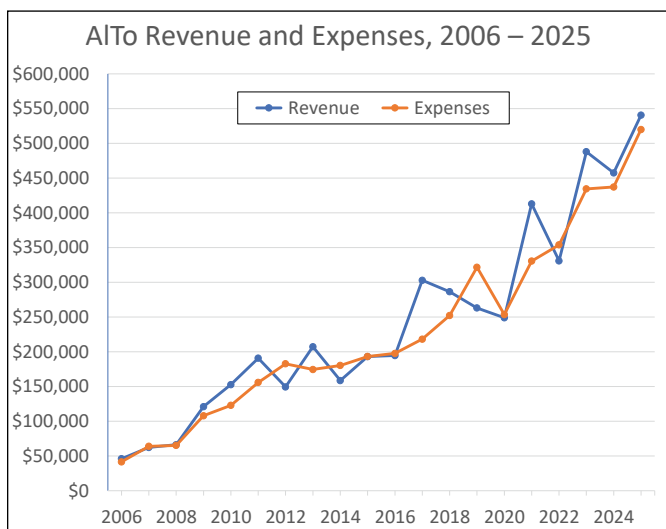
AlTo Staff 2006



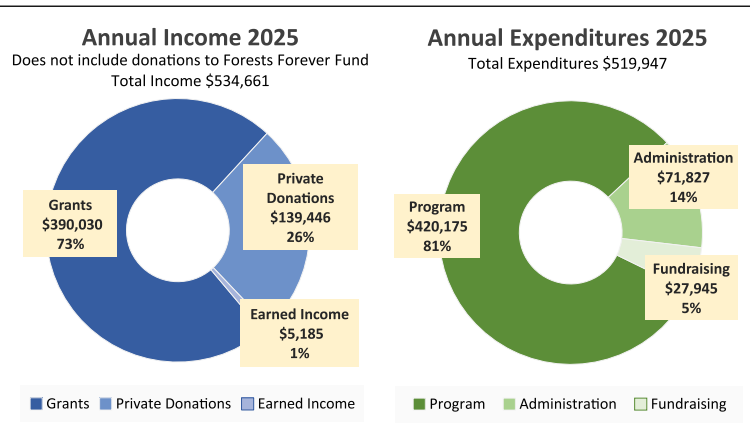
AlTo Staff 2026

When we kicked off our first Maleo conservation work in 2006, the AlTo team consisted of 6 part-time staff drawn from the local "Nature Lovers" club (above, left), a handful of part-time, rotating villagers, and a volunteer director. Today, AlTo employs 23 full-time staff (21 in Indone-

sia, 2 in the US), and more than 200 villagers and occasional helpers implementing more than 20 different programs. 51 people, plus dozens of pets, are supported entirely by AlTo wages, hundreds more partially. "We are lucky to work for AlTo," Agustian Laya, still with us since 2006, told his fellow staff. "AlTo is well managed. During Covid, many NGOs closed. But we all kept our jobs... I'm proud to work for AlTo."



AlTo Finances 2025





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The Faces of AlTo—Yvonne Kuperberg, consummate conservationist

Yvonne Kuperberg has been active in enjoying and conserving nature all her life. Probably longer than just about anyone else you know, as she just turned 100 years old. She also just retired from AlTo's US Board, saying of the new Board, "I wanted to see if they picked up on the right vibes. Now I can let go."



Courtesy photo

Yvonne grew up in Tacoma, Washington, riding her bike with her brother and identifying prairie plants in the area that is now a shopping mall. She became involved with the Girl Scouts, and lobbied to save trees from being chopped down in an era when "there was no word for conservationist." Now, she says, she's encouraged by the number of people who claim that moniker. But she wishes we would "think twice" about destructive activities like mining. "I know we need metals, but we waste a lot that gets thrown away, and could be salvaged." Yvonne speaks from experience. She was a teenager in World War II, when much of the world made a serious collective effort to "Use it up, wear it out, make it do, or do without"; conserving, repairing, and salvaging has been second nature to her ever since. She's also helped start and run countless conservation organizations and efforts at the local, regional, and national levels.

Yvonne was one of AlTo's original five US Board members who helped found the organization back before 2006. Like others, she was "jazzed up," she says, when she heard about Tompotika residents' request for help with the Maleo bird. "I didn't know what we were actually going to do, but I had faith that we would be helpful." As AlTo's first Treasurer, the early years involved a lot of work: events, fundraisers, many outreach meetings to Audubon groups and the like. "The hours and hours were not a problem. People were interested... we went to meetings where people wanted more information. There was that same enthusiastic feeling... it gave me a zing to bring them in." Now twenty years later, it's been tremendously rewarding. Yvonne says, "I've been a part of a lot of organizations.

AlTo is one of those I'm proudest to have been a part of... because of what's been accomplished. 199 Maleos! [a world record] Forests protected... Chicks not only hatching, but living. It's proof that it can be done." Yvonne has seen many changes in the world, some not so great. "Cell phones. If you're not sitting someplace with a phone in your hand, you're a Luddite. They're fantastic—and a terrible thing." But at 100, her outlook is unfailingly positive—and calm. "Just leave things alone, if you can," she says, "and take it day by day."