



Alliance for Tompotika Conservation Aliansi Konservasi Tompotika

NEWSLETTER

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Conservation Awareness goes back to school

It's great to be back! When Tompotika schools shut down during the Covid-19 pandemic, ALTO's school-based Conservation Awareness Campaign, too, was suspended—and with it one of our favorite activities. The ALTO staff love going into Tompotika classrooms and talking with kids about nature and wildlife. So, when the Education department gave us the green light to resume our school-based outreach programs, we were thrilled.

We created new curriculum. We performed new staff training. We created new give-away materials, like posters, pencils, and stickers. And another thing has changed: in the interim, the last Tompotika schools that previously did not have electricity acquired it. With that, our introductory presentation can now be given with a projector.

ALTO's Conservation Awareness Campaign focuses on one conservation topic at a time, for a period of at least a year, in order that staff can bring the Campaign to as many as possible of the 208 primary, middle, and high schools in the Tompotika region. For the present, the topic will be the ever-popular *(continued on p. 2)*



Meet Sulawesi's mascot. ALTO staff members Ipan (L) and Vivi (R) introduce primary school kids to the maleo. Almost all the kids have heard of the maleo, but almost none have ever seen one.

Maleos at Kaumosongi: Numbers increased 7-fold, protected until 2044!

On a sandy beach in a quiet bay on the east side of the Tompotika peninsula, a pair of critically endangered maleo birds are digging a hole in the sun-warmed sand, where they will deposit one huge, precious egg. In historic



Kevin Schafer

times, they would have been surrounded by dozens of other maleos doing the same thing, but, sadly in ever-decreasing numbers as time went on. Because until 2015, almost every egg that maleos laid here was dug up by a person, usually to be sold as a luxury item (similar to caviar).

But a decade ago, noticing ALTO's success in recovering maleos at the neighboring nesting ground of Libuun 16 km (10 mi) away, villagers at Kaumosongi's nearby village of Toweer asked ALTO for help. They, too, would like to recover their maleos—would ALTO be willing to start a second maleo conservation collaboration here? ALTO's response was an enthusiastic yes, with one condition: villagers would have to agree to stop taking maleo eggs, which was illegal anyway. A village meeting was held, and once invited to do so, the people made an easy decision: they did not want to lose their maleos; they would stop taking the eggs.

When poaching first ended at the newly protected Kaumosongi site in 2015, the maleo was already almost extirpated. Most *(continued on p. 3)*



Stephanie Broekarts


Kaumosongi beach: safe shelter for threatened wildlife. Reachable only by boat or a steep hillclimb, Kaumosongi's bay provides protection both from the weather and from poaching. ALTO-villager teams guard the maleo nesting ground above and the bay's sandy beaches so that maleo birds and sea turtles can nest undisturbed by poaching.

Awareness Campaign (continued from p. 1)

maleo.

In each interactive event, AITo staff present information, stories, and pictures of the maleo, encouraging questions and discussion. The kids are often shy at first, but generally warm up, eager for more. "Why is the maleo's egg so big?", "Why does it only live in Sulawesi?", "What's that helmet on its head for?", "What do we have to do to prevent its extinction?", and "What other animals besides maleo are protected?" Not all the kids' questions have answers. But their obvious fascination with the maleo, and the sense of wonder that keeps them asking, are just what we're there to nurture. ~



We All  **Maleo**. Primary, middle, and high school students from all over Tompotika are delighted and fascinated by their critically-endangered maleo mascot. Campaign events usually end with a group photo and a cheer: "**Hidup Maleo!**" (Long Live Maleo!)

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, AITo 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.

AITo 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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Tompotika: with *three* increasing sites, it's now a stronghold for maleo recovery

When the new AITo alliance first began maleo conservation work at the invitation of residents of Tompotika's village of Taima, no one knew how successful the project would prove. In 2006, AITo and our villager partners simply agreed to work together to end poaching at Taima's Libuun nesting ground, protect the surrounding habitat, and hope for the best. As it turned out, Nature was fully capable of doing the rest: removing the killer threat of egg taking by humans, and maintaining the forest habitat, opened the way for these critically-endangered maleos to make a spectacular recovery. Maleo numbers have increased *seven-fold* at Libuun, which is now the healthiest and most populous maleo nesting ground in the world, with 199 maleos recently counted at once on the nesting ground.

But we didn't stop there. At neighboring Kaumosongi, Toweer villagers invited AITo to begin a second collaborative maleo conservation effort in 2015, which has also resulted in a *seven-fold* increase (see article p. 1). And most recently, in 2019 AITo began a third conservation partnership with neighboring Pangkalaseang village at the Panganian maleo nesting ground, the lands of which AITo has even been fortunate enough to purchase from enthusiastic local landowners. At Panganian, in five years maleo numbers have already increased *four-fold*.

Wild creatures need multiple populations for a secure recovery, and there remains much work to be done elsewhere on Sulawesi, where the maleo continues to decline steeply. But in Tompotika, AITo has proven at three out of three sites that communities will willingly end egg poaching with appropriate outreach, and maleo populations will blossom in response! Despite its critically-endangered status, there remains much bright hope for Sulawesi's mascot, the marvelous maleo. ~

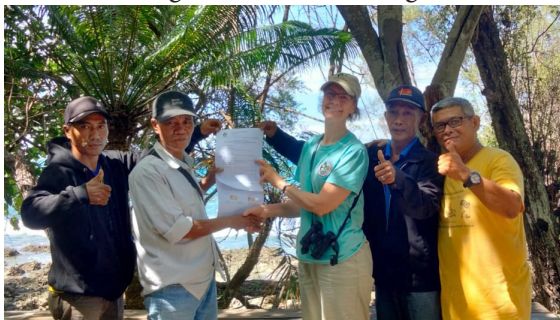


Tompotika: a stronghold for the critically-endangered maleo. Maleos that nest at AITo's three protected nesting grounds share non-breeding habitat in the Heart of Tompotika forest, which AITo is also working to protect.

Kaumosongi (continued from p.1)

days, the nesting ground was empty. But AITo and villager teams continued to guard the site, watching every day for maleos—and the sea turtles that also sometimes came to nest on the beach. Those birds that did come were protected from disturbance, and their one precious egg was not taken, but left to hatch naturally. And, little by little, their numbers grew. Though maleos prefer to nest in the company of other maleos, in the early years, numbers were low, and guard teams witnessed at most only a single pair of maleos at once. But now as many as four pairs at once may be seen on the nesting ground. And overall, in nine years, maleo numbers at Kaumosongi have increased more than *seven-fold*, from an average of 0.16 birds per day in 2015, to 1.25 birds per day in 2023!

And now, there is even more good news for maleos at Kaumosongi. After several years of negotiations, AITo and the owners of the 8-ha (20-acre) Kaumosongi site have now reached a 20-year lease agreement that will allow AITo to continue protecting the site for the long term. With strong support from the village for their recovery, their nesting ground protected from poaching, and AITo's related efforts to protect adjacent large areas of non-breeding forest habitat, the future for Kaumosongi's maleos looks bright indeed. Our dream



is that one day, villagers here will once again boast of their beach being "*black with maleos*"! ~

Long-term protection. Pak Sulaeman (2nd from R) and his family, land-owners of the Kaumosongi maleo nesting area, have signed an agreement leasing the area to AITo until 2044. Local villagers will continue to team up with AITo staff to guard and monitor the nesting ground.

New Czech Sea Turtle Collaboration

As the 2024 sea turtle nesting season winds to a close, AITo is delighted to welcome a new conservation partner: Chráňme mořské želvy z.s. (CMZ), the Save Turtle NGO of the Czech Republic. The Czech team is led by Hana Svobodová, who has many years' experience working with sea turtle conservation in Indonesia, including helping to save thousands of turtles at the world's third largest Green Turtle nesting area in East Kalimantan. Late last year, CMZ approached AITo interested in helping to support our efforts. After a visit by their team to Tompotika this year, we realized that not only their funding support, but their sea turtle enthusiasm and expertise could be a great asset in helping to train and inspire AITo's Tompotika staff.

AITo is all about people and nature healing each other—diverse people, in partnership. We're delighted to welcome the Czech team as new partners and special advocates for sea turtles in the AITo alliance. ~



Vivi Tan Oga

Dawn nesting. A mother Olive Ridley turtle returns to the sea after laying her clutch of eggs on Libuun beach. Without AITo, these eggs almost certainly would be poached. Instead they'll be protected, and the Czech team will help track the data and results.

Art for Conservation: Celebrating Forests in the Pacific Northwest and Sulawesi

In April, a large mural created by 4th & 5th graders and aimed at celebrating the commonalities between wildlife of Sulawesi and the Pacific Northwest of the USA went on display at Vashon Island's Center for the Arts. Organized by AITo and led by artist Sandra Noel, the mural featured pairs of species separated by half a planet, but remarkably similar in their body types, ecological niches, and need for conservation. The fisher of the Pacific Northwest and the

Sulawesi Giant Civet, for instance, are both shy arboreal carnivores that are threatened by human hunters and loss of their forest habitat—and they're both instant favorites with kids, who embraced the project with gusto.

As they drew and painted, students learned about how species in both tropical and temperate forests are connected in webs of biodiversity, while damage to these webs cascades throughout forest ecosystems and



the entire planet. Said Harbor School art teacher Alisara Martin, "It ignited a collective passion for how science and visual art can work together." According to 5th-grader Eloise, "It was really fun to learn about all the different animals... I learned a lot about how important forests are!" ~



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The Faces of ALTo - Etty Seno: "For the future of our children"



Galen Priest

Maria "Etty" Goreti Seno is, among other things, the pet lady of Tanah Merah. In this small village in the foothills of Mt. Tompotika, there are a number of dogs milling about, but Etty has not only four dogs, but three cats that she takes care of. They all roam freely about the village, but she makes food for them twice a day, and they come home at night. They keep her company in her simple clapboard house, where she and her 10-year-old son John usually sleep alone. Etty's husband Febi is gone for long periods working as a driver in the city of Luwuk, four hours away. The dogs are good guards, Etty says, and the cats... well, "I just like cats," she says.

Etty was born in Indonesia's island of West Timor, and moved to Sulawesi with her family as part of a government transmigration program in 1995, when she was 10 years old. Now, she is a housewife, runs a small kiosk shop, and helps cook for ALTo when we have guests or activities in her village. "ALTo is really, really terrific. I thank ALTo for its care, and I hope everyone in ALTo is given a long life. She embraces ALTo's conservation ethic. "I rarely go up into the forest, but I know we have to guard it. [Here] we have clean water, clean nature, a pleasant atmosphere, and far from pollution. For a few years now, we have been protecting it, and I, too, have to take part in guarding this forest."

When we talk about building a "culture of care," Etty is a shining example: endlessly energetic on behalf of others, indefatigably pleasant, smiling, and eager to help. "I'm really proud that even though I don't speak English, through ALTo I meet new friends from outside." When the ALTo team leaves, she says, "it's too silent in our village!" Etty is thankful for her parents, "who made it possible for me to be on the face of the earth, and brought me up from little to big. I can never thank them enough for that." Formerly, Etty wanted to go to school, but life worked out differently, and she shows no bitterness. Now, her dreams are for her child, and his career and future. "If I take care of my home, I take care of my child's future." And it's not just her own, but all children that she cares about. "We must take care of what we have received, so that our children and grandchildren also can use and enjoy it. We must always look after the forest. Always look after the nature and the wildlife here." Etty's greatest wishes, she says, are for the children. "Their future remains to be realized." ~