

## Komodo & Galapagos:

# Uniting Two Different Worlds

**Y**ou travel by boat to an arid isle in a far-off sea. The horizon presents a harsh volcanic landscape inhabited by fearless birds and strange archaic reptiles. At last—Komodo. Surely there's no place like it on Earth.

But wait! Halfway around the globe you find yourself on another boat in another far-off sea. The volcanoes are a little fresher and you've traded giant lizards for giant tortoises. This could be déjà vu, or is it...the Galapagos?

In this light it seems utterly plausible that the 19th century naturalist explorers, Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace, entertained convergent thoughts on evolution. Their natural laboratories on opposite ends of the planet weren't so different after all.

### Uncanny Parallels

The uncanny parallels between Galapagos

### Similar parks share lessons in sustainability

and Komodo—each of them national parks, World Heritage Sites and Biosphere Reserves, each of them sanctuaries for marine and terrestrial treasures that face a slew of similar threats—did not escape the attention of Andy Drumm, head of The Nature Conservancy (TNC) Ecotourism Program.

But Drumm also understood that there were serious differences between Galapagos and Komodo. Galapagos National Park—the archetypal ecotourism case study—has been the focus of decades of intensive research on tourism impacts and management. By contrast, tourism at Komodo has developed largely unchecked. “There was an enormous

potential for sharing experiences and mutual learning between these two unique island ecosystems,” Drumm observed.

### A Meeting of Minds

And so, in early 2001, TNC assembled an Indonesian delegation. Ir. Widodo Ramono (National Parks Director), Mr. Johanes Pake Pani (East Nusa Tenggara Vice Governor), Mr. Anthony Bagur Dagul (Manggarai Regent), Mr. Alex Retraubun (Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries), Ms. Rili Djohani (TNC's Southeast Asia Center for Marine Protected Areas) and Mr. Feisol Hashim (ASEAN Travel Association President) were hosted by Eliecer Cruz, Galapagos National Park Director, to visit the Galapagos. Financial support was provided by USAID and the Alex C. Walker Educational and Charitable Trust.

TNC's Rili Djohani, who had recently consulted on the 25-year Komodo National Park Management Plan, was particularly thrilled to make new friends at another high-profile park that faced familiar social challenges.

“We were embracing each other as we shared the same community issues, impacts and constituencies,” says Djohani.

On another level, Djohani was grateful that the time spent in the field brought together Indonesian resource managers that, though working toward the same goals, were often isolated in faraway offices. “That experience really bonded us,” she says. The group has worked more effectively as a team ever since.

Djohani sees immense potential for Komodo managers to learn from the Galapagos. Years of impact monitoring



TNC Doc.







in a park that now receives some 70,000 visitors a year can help define sustainable visitation levels for Komodo. Strategies for licensing tour operators and for certifying guides are also worthy of study, as is a policy for retaining park revenue on site. Meanwhile, Komodo managers can share experience on their conservation science, resource monitoring and outreach programs.

### **Island Eco-Network**

In the Galapagos, delegates from Indonesia and Ecuador were joined by protected area managers from Venezuela and the Gulf of California. The outcome of the five-day gathering was a signed Declaration of Cooperation between five island protected areas, including Komodo and the Galapagos. Signatories committed to share technical assistance on management issues, particularly with regards to tourism. The new partners envision this agreement as the launch of an 'Island Eco-Network'.

Back in Indonesia, the Directorate General of Forest Protection and Nature Conservation now deliberates on a collaborative management plan for Komodo National Park (NP). The plan outlines a formal framework for cooperation between park authorities and a TNC joint venture dedicated to conservation and tourism management. A prime goal of collaborative management would be financial sustainability, whereby Komodo tourism revenue supports on-site resource protection. Here Komodo managers look to the Galapagos for a model vastly different from their own.

In 1999 Ecuador enacted a 'Special Law for Conservation and Sustainable Development of the Galapagos Islands'. The law raised usage fees for the park as well as the ratio of fees that stay on-site. Park visitors pay on a sliding scale; most foreign adults pay \$100 while Ecuadorians pay \$6. The park collects additional revenue from 80 liveaboard concessions (US\$50 to US\$250 per berth per year) and private boats, whose passengers pay \$200 each day.

### **Keeping Conservation Funds On-Site**

Whereas most park revenue once went straight to the Environmental Ministry, the Special Law assures that 45% is retained for management of the park and surrounding marine reserve. Another 5% is earmarked for Navy park patrols. Remaining funds go to regional and central government but must be used for education, health, athletic and environmental projects, environmental services or visitor services. Such widely appreciated projects boost the local popularity of Galapagos conservation.

"Galapagos is idyllic," says Indonesia's Director of National Parks Ir. Widodo Ramono. "The law there really supports park sustainability. And because the park is a revenue source, the director has strong support from local

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government, NGOs and the Ministry of Tourism. They stand together to find solutions on exploitative fishing and other issues."

By contrast, visitors to Komodo now pay less than US\$2 a day. These funds go straight to local and regional government; just a tiny fraction ever make it back.

### **Komodo Needs an Upgrade**

It's not that Komodo guests would refuse to pay more. A 1999 AC Nielsen survey indicated that a majority of visitors would support higher entrance fees so long as use of the funds was made clear. Most guests also recognized the need for park improvements. Two-thirds felt that current guiding is inadequate and over half felt that interpretation and Komodo dragon viewing facilities should be upgraded.

Continued protection of Komodo is also, of course, critical. For the past

seven years, The Nature Conservancy has generously subsidized patrols, conservation awareness campaigns, and development of sustainable livelihoods in and around the park. Careful monitoring has shown an increase in healthy coral area since TNC arrived, and the World Resources Institute has highlighted the site as one of just a handful of effectively managed Marine Protected Areas in Indonesia.

### **Holding the Fort**

Yet conservation pressures mount day-by-day as surrounding reefs degrade further and destructive fishermen encroach farther. TNC can't hold the fort—and foot the bill—forever.

The park must pay for itself. Sustainable tourism seems the best opportunity.

Tourism management, however, is not in TNC's charter. They have neither the will nor the capacity to tackle such an ambitious job on their own. Hence the collaborative plan linking TNC, Komodo National Park, a private tourism consulting agency and a multistakeholder advisory board.

On first glance, the plan meets with approval from various levels of Indonesian government. Yet after several months of consideration, has yet to meet with final approval. What's the hold up?

### **Poised to Set New Precedents**

"Indonesian law is very unclear on collaborative management," claims Widodo Ramono. Though there exists minor text on the issue, no guidelines are mapped out. "If we we can implement the Komodo plan, we can create a concrete model."

As of today, Komodo National Park sits poised to set new precedents both in legal policy and sustainable management. As Komodo enters this brave new territory it's nice to know that somewhere, on a far-off sea, Komodo has a friend.

"An important next step," says Andy Drumm, "is to unite the Galapagos and Komodo on another level—to stimulate further dialogue among park managers and local stakeholders, including communities and tourism operators to develop model ecotourism operations"



