

# The Derawan Islands

## *Protecting an Underwater Paradise*

Stretching over 100 miles along the coast of East Kalimantan, the Derawan island chain is one of the most biologically rich areas in all of Indonesia. Here, water from the Berau river mixing with the Sulawesi Sea created a unique seascape characterized by a broad river delta leading to a scattered groupings of patch reefs, fringing reefs, and atolls.

Recent marine surveys by The Nature Conservancy and a team of international experts showed that this area contains more than 460 different species of coral, giving it the world's second highest level of hard coral diversity after the Raja Ampat Islands in eastern Indonesia. The study also documented more than 870 species of fish, ranging from tiny pygmy seahorses to giant manta rays. On some days, groups of up to 50 manta rays have been seen feeding together in Derawan's waters.

In addition to its coral and fish diversity, the Derawan chain contains Indonesia's largest nesting site for endangered green sea turtles, which emerge from the sea every night to lay their eggs on the white sand beaches of Sangalaki and Derawan Islands. Another island in the chain, Semama, is an important bird sanctuary, and Kakaban Island contains the world's largest and most diverse jellyfish lake, with four unique species of stingless jellyfish. Kakaban is being considered for nomination as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Overharvesting of fish and marine invertebrates such as sea cucumber, turtle poaching, and destructive fishing practices threaten



Sea turtle near Sangalaki Island ©Don Bason/The Nature Conservancy

species, habitats and livelihoods of future generations of coastal people.

The marine environment of the Derawan Islands is also threatened by unsustainable land-use patterns in the watershed of the Berau river, resulting in siltation and pollution of reefs—an issue that the Conservancy's terrestrial team is currently addressing with the Berau District Government.

To protect these unique islands, the Conservancy is forging a strong partnership with WWF, Mitra Pesisir (a USAID project), and Kehati, to work together with provincial and district governments, local NGOs Bestari and Kalbu, as well as communities, and establish a co-managed marine protected area that includes use zones and no-take zones. This strategy will help

conserve Derawan's biodiversity while benefiting local communities who rely on marine resources for their livelihoods. To support our field activities, the Conservancy established a field office in Derawan in 2004.

In the next year, the Conservancy and our partners will work with the government and communities to delineate boundaries and zones of the new marine protected area, to put effective marine protected area management in place, and to integrate the Derawan marine protected system into the newly-formed Berau District's spatial plan. This collaborative strategy will ensure the survival of the entire mosaic of marine life that makes the Derawan Islands one of the world's richest and most unusual places.