

# THE RAJA AMPAT ISLANDS

## *In the Heart of the Coral Triangle*

The Raja Ampat, or “Four Kings,” archipelago encompasses more than 9.8 million acres of land and sea off the northwestern tip of Indonesia’s West Papua Province. Located in the Coral Triangle, the heart of the world’s coral reef biodiversity, the seas around Raja Ampat possibly hold the richest variety of species in the world.

The area’s massive coral colonies show that its reefs are resistant to threats like coral bleaching and disease—threats that now jeopardize the survival of corals around the world. In addition, Raja Ampat’s strong ocean currents sweep coral larvae across the Indian and Pacific Oceans to replenish other reef ecosystems. Raja Ampat’s coral diversity, resilience to threats, and ability to replenish reefs make it a global priority for marine protection.

**Survey Confirms Highest Marine Biodiversity on Earth.** In 2002, The Nature Conservancy and its partners conducted a scientific survey of the Raja Ampat Islands to collect information on its marine ecosystems, mangroves, and forests. The survey brought Raja Ampat’s total number of confirmed corals to 537 species—an incredible 75% of all known coral species. In addition, 828 fish species were recorded, raising the known total for Raja Ampat to an amazing 1,074. On land, the survey found lush forests, rare plants, limestone outcroppings, and nesting beaches for thousands of sea turtles.



Raja Ampat Islands ©Mark Erdmann

Though human impacts here are less severe than elsewhere in Indonesia, Raja Ampat’s natural resources are endangered by overfishing and destructive fishing, turtle poaching, and unsustainable logging. The Indonesian government recently established Raja Ampat as a separate administrative unit, which will give communities a greater say in managing the natural resources upon which their livelihoods depend. This structure also offers an important opportunity to include conservation in the spatial planning of the newly formed local government.

**Ensuring Conservation through Partnerships.** To address these issues, the Conservancy launched a new project to protect Raja Ampat, working in close partnership with the

government and communities to: 1) contribute to a comprehensive conservation action plan to protect Raja Ampat’s reefs and forests; 2) help incorporate marine protected area management into long-term planning and policy; and, 3) establish a network of marine protected areas for Raja Ampat.

The Conservancy’s ultimate goal is to protect Raja Ampat’s magnificent reefs while sustaining the livelihoods of local people. Raja Ampat includes the four large islands of Waigeo, Batanta, Salawati, and Misool, plus hundreds of smaller islands. The archipelago is part of an area known as the Bird’s Head functional seascape, which also contains Cenderawasih Bay, the largest marine national park in Indonesia.