



Waii's local fresh water eels are similar to the salt water species of conger eel.



Looking like smoke, a broken raw egg spills into the fresh water stream providing another treat for one of the eels.



Village patriarch and protector of the eels, Magnus with a group of local kids from the village. My presence with scuba gear caused a lot of excitement.

as well as being the local swimming hole for the village children.

The stream is an L-shaped channel and just a meter deep until the end, where it turns into a kind of cul-de-sac. There is a large tree at this end and some benches where people gather. At this point the stream bed becomes about three meters deep. This part of the stream is the home to a large number of fresh water eels similar in size and shape to salt water conger eels. These are said to be sacred and are under the watchful care of the village patriarch, Magnus. 61 years old with short white hair and a few missing teeth that become obvious when he smiles, Magnus has adopted these eels and feeds them every day with raw eggs.

He claims that there are hundreds of eels in this area of the stream and as soon as he steps into the shallow area adjacent to the eels' domain, several of the bigger residents swim out to greet him. In the village, it is forbidden to harm the eels in any way and stories of bad children turning into eels are

forever used as a way to keep the villages younger kids in line.

As soon as I see the stream, meet Magnus, and hear that there are "hundreds" of eels in the water, I tell my hosts that I have to go in to see for myself...and I really want to take my camera. About 15 minutes of discussion and negotiation takes place. Magnus understands why I'm in Ambon. He understands that the island has suffered since "the conflict" and that any opportunity to help the area or encourage people to come back to Ambon is a good thing. It is agreed that I can come back in two days and bring my scuba gear. We will pay him and the village about 100,000 rupiah for his kindness... about \$10.

So two days later we're back. This time with scuba gear, camera, housing and strobes. This, of course, is a huge event for Waii village and I attract a lot of attention. It's not everyday that a white American with scuba gear comes to dive with the local eels. As a matter of fact, it was a village first.

So with Magnus' blessing I step into the ten-foot deep stream without scuba just to check things out. Whoa, it's a little chilly...not the 84 degrees that I've been used to while diving in the Banda Sea. Good thing I brought a 3mm wetsuit not only for protection from scrapes on the shallow bottom but from the chilly fresh water stream.

As soon as I step in, two of the eels swim right up to me, certainly thinking I've got raw eggs waiting for them. They are just curious and not dangerous in the least. As a matter of fact, once I put on my scuba gear and start making bubbles they retreat into the many holes in the side of the stream wall.

I motion to Magnus to come in and start to offer the eggs and it takes a few minutes before one of the shy eels decides to overcome its fear of me and go grab a free meal. By this time I have an audience of maybe 15 kids and a few curious adults, everyone laughing and cheering at the unusual site of me taking pictures of their sacred eels. He feeds



Maggnus feeding one of the local eels

from two huge six-foot speakers on the porch of one of houses at the entry to the village and overlooking the stream. So here I am in Ambon, Indonesia, in a stream filled with fresh water eels, cheering kids, women washing clothes, and Celion Dion blasting from two six-foot stereo speakers in a village house with no running water. I'm thinking to myself, there is no way to explain this to anyone; you just have to be here and see for yourself.

I wouldn't have changed a thing. Except maybe the music... a little Bruce Springsteen would have definitely expanded the culture!

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the eels for about half an hour and then motions that he wants to find one of the bigger eels further upstream in the shallow area that the kids swim in. I follow him with the camera, and like the Pied Piper, the village kids follow us on our next stop. There are eels everywhere in the stream, even where the women are washing clothes. No one seems to mind.

There's a sort of surreal aspect to this whole encounter. The whole time I'm in the stream with Maggnus and the eels very loud music is coming

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