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The Shamba Times

Kenya Horticultural Society North Coast District

KENYA HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY



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Our cover photo



Our cover picture this month is a small corner of what must surely be the most important garden on the coast. It is the home of Malindi Tropical Nursery and of its founder, garden designer, Evie Walsh.

Malindi Tropical Nursery was the first stop on the recent KHS Coastal Gardens' Tour by a group of members from up-country, and the garden and nursery contain a remarkable collection of tropical plants, a pottery, a carpentry shop, and much more. Members can visit the garden at anytime (there is a small entrance fee payable which is redeemed if you purchase any pots or plants).

Chairman's Notes

A very warm welcome to the January 2023 edition of The Shamba Times. And in this edition we celebrate two important anniversaries, the centenary of Kenya Horticultural Society (KHS) and its 100 years of existence as a national society, and the tenth anniversary of The Shamba Times, our very own KHS North Coast District newsletter.

Our first feature in this edition is a report of the KHS Coastal Gardens' Tour that took place at the end of October.



Gosh, did the tour pack in a lot of gardens, along with the Arabuko Sokoke Forest and the Mida Creek, all in one weekend.

When the piece about the tour, written by former KHS Chair of Council, Sally Shaw, reached me I was struck by one line that Sally wrote, and that you will read. 'Many of us started the trip as strangers, but have returned to Nairobi as friends'.

I think I might know why. They may have been strangers, but what those sixteen KHS members had in common was their mutual love of plants and gardens, and their concern for the natural environment. Visiting gardens is a joy I have come to only later in life, but one that I now value above many other experiences. Visiting a new garden is often like discovering a new world full of new shapes, new colours, new patterns, and new ideas. Our NCD visit to Pauline and Elio Balletto's garden in October was exactly that - a visit to a very special place, full of fascinating plants and displays, but also a haven of peace. The garden just felt right somehow, and many members have told me they felt real joy that morning in that garden.

So, in this its centenary year, KHS sets out to share that joy of gardening and our love of plants and the natural environment. We want to bring others into our world, particularly young Kenyans, and to share with them the joy that comes from being at one with nature. Please help us do just that.

Crispin Sharp.

The KHS Centenary Year



The Kenya Horticultural Society was founded in 1923 by a small group of enthusiastic horticulturalists and gardeners, led by Lady Muriel Jex-Blake. Lady Muriel was a daughter of the Earl of Pembroke, and married to Arthur Jex-Blake who was a British physician specialising in heart and lung diseases. They had married in 1920 and then moved to Kenya. Muriel Jex-Blake is probably best remembered for her co-authorship of *Gardening in East Africa* which she and other members of the newly formed KHS wrote together. The book was edited by Arthur Jex-Blake, and is still in updated production today.



CALENDAR OF KHS CENTENARY EVENTS

28 January 2023 – Origins – A Dance for Plants

One of the KHS Centenary projects is carrying out a school's project of horticultural value. With regards to this, KHS is sponsoring production of learning manuals for teachers in various schools who teach horticulture. Sally Shaw is spearheading a fundraising of funds to assist with the production of the same through holding a dance for plants events. All KHS members are welcome to attend. (Poster attached)



22 April 2023 – AGM of the KHS

Annual General Meeting of the Main Society. Venue to be confirmed

9 – 11 June 2023 – KHS Centenary Flower & Plant Show



This will be held at the Sarit Center in Westlands, Nairobi.

Friday 9 th	2.00pm to 5.00pm
Saturday 10 th	10.00am to 5.00pm
Sunday 11 th	10.00 am to 3.00pm

10 June – KHS Dinner & Dance at the Muthaiga Country Club,

On this evening the society will celebrate 100 years of the society existence. The Rare Art and Plant Auction will happen as part of the event.

19 June – Date of the first KHS meeting in 1923

According to the KHS history, the society held its first meeting on 19 June 1923. So 19 June 2023 is a prospective date to hold a meeting within all Districts to commemorate the very first meeting of KHS.

My Garden on Vipingo Ridge

When we bought our one-acre plot on Vipingo Ridge in early 2008, it was thick bush with a few trees rising above it. The golf course was under construction and we chose this east-facing spot because it is on the highest ridge and overlooks the 15th Green and has a long view down the 16th fairway.



We were still living in Saudi Arabia and flew out every month to monitor the construction of "Pumzika" - the name suggested by Richard's father for our new home. As our Moroccan riad-style house rose up from its foundations, I couldn't imagine how the mess surrounding it would ever evolve into a garden. We chose Colleen Street to be our landscaper and went through what we wanted in detail. My first request was a couple of baobab trees and we also wanted trees and shrubs on our left and right boundaries to block out our neighbour's houses.



We planted a series of desert roses to delineate our border fronting the golf course and, with so much green surrounding us, we used bougainvillea for the other three sides. I am constantly amazed at the variety of vivid colours produced by these plants. I also planted lots of these in pots to climb up the front of the house, and on our roof terrace. When they are all in flower, they look fantastic against the white walls.

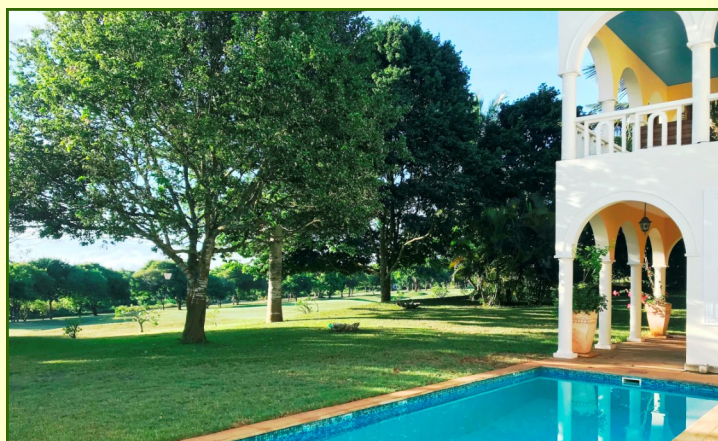


Next were some flamboyant trees to give another burst of colour, a couple of Nandi flames to remind Richard of his family home in Thika, and some palm trees for the sound of their fronds waving in the breeze. Other flowering trees and shrubs included yellow oleander, tabebuia rosea, and yellow and purple allamanda. We planted several frangipanis for their beautiful scented flowers, with one close to the veranda. At the time, I didn't know about Petreas so have only recently planted some.

By Bizzie Frost



As the garden began to take shape around the house, there was one funny little tree a few metres in front of our swimming pool. We wanted to dig it out, but Colleen insisted we should keep this indigenous tree. Over the next twelve years, it has grown to the height of the house providing nice shade over the pool. As no one knows the name of this tree, we call it the Lucky Tree as it was saved by Colleen.



Growing a lawn has been our greatest challenge, mainly because of water. Richard wanted our lawn to flow seamlessly onto the golf course so we grew paspalum grass around the front of the house and Pemba grass everywhere else. As our building regulations dictated that we have a biodigester for our wastewater, we also invested in an automated irrigation system to make use of the recycled water. Unfortunately, with only two of us here most of the time, we don't produce enough for good irrigation so the grass suffers badly in the dry season.

Another space that gives us huge pleasure is our courtyard. I bought several books on courtyard design and all agreed on the essential elements: it must have plants and a water feature, and it must be used. Apart from the golden palms in three corners, all the plants have to be regularly "rested" outside in the nursery and different ones put in their place.



As well as plants, I've also had the fun of nurturing frogs' eggs found in our swimming pool until they became little frogs. I've kept three caterpillars found on our desert roses until each metamorphosed into pupa, chrysalis, and finally into beautiful, large Oleander moths! Vipingo Ridge now has various species of imported wildlife so it is not unusual to find an eland, waterbuck or oryx in the garden.

About Bizzie Frost

Bizzie Frost was born in Nakuru and raised in Kericho. After secretarial and nursing training in the UK, she travelled the "Hippie Trail" to India, taking local buses, trains and lifts with British truck drivers. This journey sparked her interest in photography and she later became a self-taught photographer. In 1984, she and her family moved to Saudi Arabia where, despite being forbidden to work, she became a Saudi wedding photographer. An introduction to the Saudi Gazette newspaper editor led her to becoming a freelance journalist, writing for the paper for twenty-six years. Writing up her memoirs of those years in the comfort of her new home in Vipingo Ridge, Bizzie's first book, *Travels with Maridadi - Harley-Davidson Adventures in Saudi Arabia*, is to be published in the UK on 23 March 2023.

A KHS garden tour to the coast



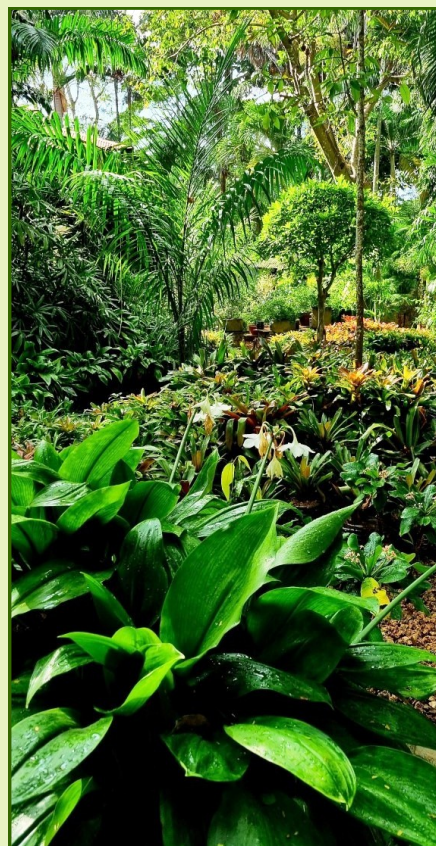
KHS Arabuko Forest and North Coast Tour

Sixteen Kenya Horticultural Society members from six different districts assembled at JKIA for the early morning flight to Malindi. We all managed to meet up and a quick call to the two missing members found them already on the plane!

A comfortable 22 seater coach met us at the airport and our exploration of the varied gardens along the North Coast began. The first stop was the beautiful mature garden and plant nursery of Evelyn Walsh in Malindi, where we were made very welcome and treated to delicious refreshments. Pauline Balletto had kindly agreed to be our guide.

The garden was lush and tropical, despite the best efforts of the peacocks that were strutting around. Beautiful corners with exquisite combinations of plants.

It was unfortunate that our coach driver initially took us to the wrong location as our tour of this delightful garden had to be a little rushed.

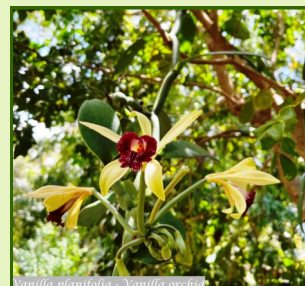


We then set off to our next destination The Hanging Gardens of Malindi belonging to Nick Conway. Although only a short distance from Evi's garden, the difference was stark with the desert-like ground acting as the perfect backdrop for the stunning orchids and Tillandsias. We were even

treated to a peak at the wormery!

Then hurriedly off to our next garden The Ndoro Sculpture Garden of Carola Rasmussen which was yet another completely different style of garden with the focus being on the sculptures. Carola gave us an informative introduction to the artworks which are all by Zimbabwean artisans and then escorted us around the garden, explaining the various works & the ideas behind them. There are around 350 sculptures dotted around the garden!

We then headed to Ocean Sports, Watamu, our hotel for the trip.



30 September – 2 October 2022



Eucharis Lily

We finished the day with a visit to the garden of Mr & Mrs Jonathan Knowles just down the beach from the hotel. The garden has been created and maintained by Evie Walsh and once again Pauline Balletto was our guide. The garden was beautifully designed and meticulously maintained, with spectacular tropical planting and a wonderful new rock garden. To top off the already amazing day full of wonder, we were treated to an extravagant tea time spread!

The following day started with our trip to the Arabuko Sokoke Forest. Our guides were Jonathan Baya and Willy Nganda and what informed guides they were! We learnt the medicinal values of the trees, spotted the elusive Golden-Rumped Elephant Shrew and found a couple of well camouflaged owls amongst our many sightings. There was a trek up to Nyari view point and then down to learn about the mangrove regeneration projects before a well deserved lunch at the Crab Shack.



Verreaux's Eagle-owl



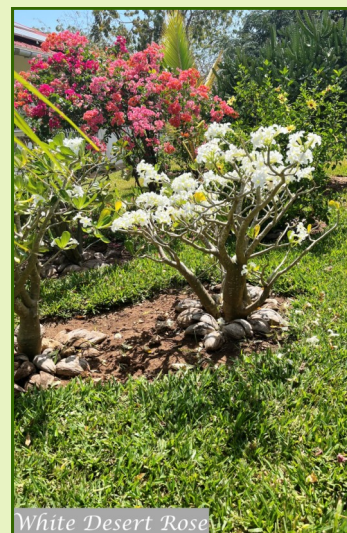
We finished our action packed day with a lovely, relaxing sunset cruise up and down Mida Creek on David Darnborough's dhow – bliss!





Tecomanthe dendrophila

And sadly to the last day of our North Coast Tour. We say goodbye to Watumu and head to Kilifi to Marion Langham's garden. It's hard to believe that Marion's garden is only 3 years old. It is so vibrant and full of colour. The plants look so well established, as if they've been there forever.



White Desert Rose

The final leg of our whistle-stop tour of the North Coast – Vipingo Ridge where we meet up with Colleen Street. The first visit was a roof top garden created by Colleen with just a 1/2m depth of soil! The roof was covered with plants and showed what can be done with thought and planning. And so finally onto some areas of garden created by Vicki Horsey in different styles. There was an amazing bank of just bare soil which was a gorgeous back drop for the plantings in front of it and then onto a totally different courtyard area.



All the gardens and places we visited were so different and interesting. I've only touched on the surface of what we saw. I think we could all have happily spent a whole day in each of the gardens and still not had enough! Many of us started the trip as strangers but have returned to Nairobi as friends.

We would wholeheartedly like to thank Vishy Talwar, KHS Council Chairman, for doing the research and finding the gardens, North coast Chairman Crispin

Sharp and the North Coast members for their support and generosity and Mariam Maissara, the KHS office administrator, for pulling everything together. We look forward to the next KHS tour!

Photo credits: Nutan Patel, Ben Arentz, Sue Ashworth, Gail Paul, Marion Langham & Sally Shaw

Images from NCD gardens.

A gallery of members' recent photographs



White kalanchoe

Nicola Morrell, Kilifi.



Kalanchoe blossfeldiana

Crispin Sharp, Malindi.



Indigenous kalanchoe

Nicola Morrell, Kilifi.



Bougainvillea

Carissa Nightingale, Kuruwitu..



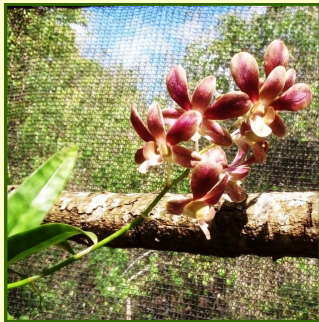
Datura stramonium

Mariola Saliola, Malindi.



Millettia pinata

Jayne Ruguru Kaufmann, Kilifi.



Orchid

Baraka Ngamani



Orchid

Baraka Ngamani



Orchid

Baraka Ngamani



Pereskia bleo

Wendy Taylor, Kilifi.



Gardenia volkensii

Jess McKenzie Morrell, Kilifi.

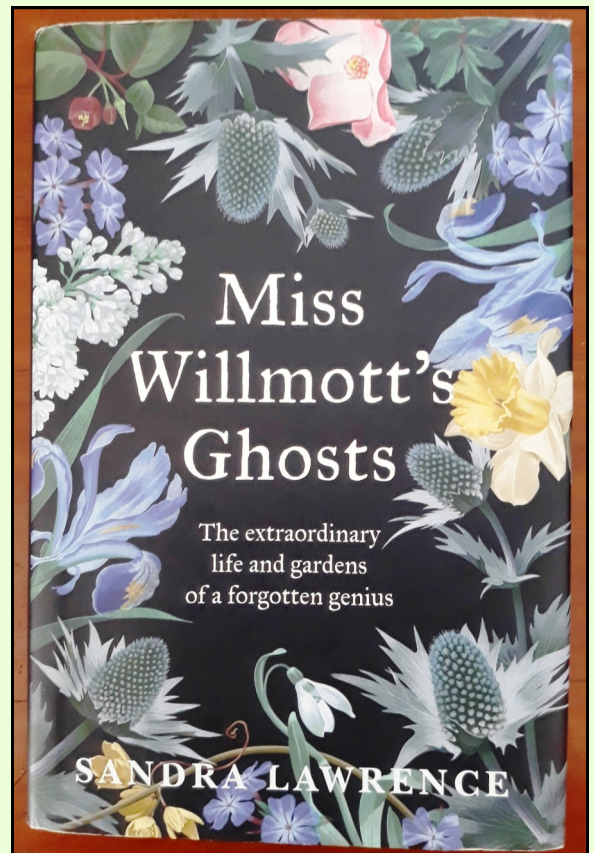


Rose

Pauline Balletto, Malindi.

A Historical Rewilding

“What’s this all about?” I thought as I read the first few lines of a review of a book, ‘Miss Willmott’s Ghosts: The extraordinary life and gardens of a forgotten genius’ by *Sandra Lawrence*...First, a mention of the Royal Horticultural Society (of which, by the way, Kenya Horticultural Society is an associate) and the bestowing in October 1897 of its highest award, the Victoria Medal of Honour which was struck to commemorate the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee, to 60 of gardening’s greatest luminaries. Secondly, a revelation that, for the first time ever, these included two females. One was Gertrude Jekyll, a well-known figure to this day as a British horticulturist, garden designer, writer and artist; the other was Ellen Willmott, whose name is not nowadays a familiar one - at least, not outside gardening circles. Thirdly, the no-show of Ellen at the award ceremony, a very shocking misdemeanour. Finally, mention of the name and location of the garden at the centre of the book’s story: Warley Place at Great Warley in Brentwood, which lies in Essex, South-east England, and my home town!



None of this was previously known to me but, as luck would have it, a visit home was pending. So, soon after our arrival and armed with the newly-purchased book, off we set to explore her legacy at Warley Place.

In 1876, Ellen Ann, when aged 17, moved with her parents and her sister into the grandly refurbished Queen Anne style house with its 33 acres of grounds and views across an area of rolling hillsides in the Essex countryside. Within two miles reach of Brentwood railway station, her father, Frederick, commuted to London’s Liverpool Street to his solicitor’s practice on the south side of the Thames. With the income from his successful business and Mrs Willmott’s early inheritance of her deceased mother’s estate, the remodelling of the grounds commenced. But it was perhaps Ellen’s personal wealth - on every birthday, she received a cheque for £1,000 - today worth £126,600 - from her godmother and later, a substantial inheritance from her, which enabled her to have full rein over the creation of the garden and to pursue so many ambitious and innovative developments within it.

Baulking at Frederick’s desire to have respectable, formal flower beds and lawns “to impress the neighbours”, the females in the family sought to follow the ‘natural look’ as controversially advocated by William Robinson in his book, *The Wild Garden*, 1870. Amongst other things, this involved replicating plants’ natural habitat as a way of encouraging them to grow naturally. This was the approach adopted in the creation of Ellen’s alpine garden. Alpine gardens or rockeries became hugely fashionable around that time but rather oddly so since they were hardly appropriate for the British climate and environment. “The word ‘alpine’ is given to plants growing at high altitudes. Thriving in the bitterest conditions, their roots delving into crevices, anchoring themselves against harsh winters and high winds.”

Ellen was hugely successful in adopting the naturalistic style: a three-acre site comprising an alpine meadow planted with thousands of miniature bulbs, ravines made of huge slabs of rock cut from the remote Derbyshire peaks, a cascading stream sometimes forming rock pools, undulating mountain paths, and a fern grotto. The Warley Place Garden became famous throughout Britain and beyond and was visited by Royalty and gardening luminaries.

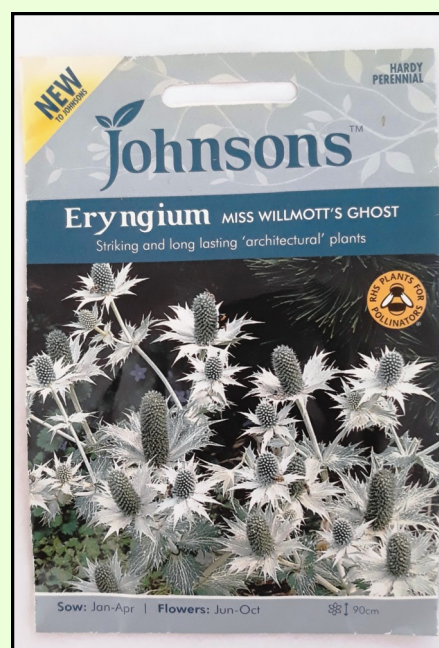


Ellen joined the Royal Horticultural Society in 1894 and soon became a prominent member. She was elected to various committees - narcissus, floral and lily. She funded plant-hunting expeditions to China and the Middle East with some species discovered on them being named after her. Indeed, some 50 plant species were named for her or her gardens including: *Rosa willmottiae* (as illustrated), *Narcissus* 'Miss Willmott' (daffodil), *Lathyrus oderatus* 'Miss Willmott' (sweetpea), and *Iris willmottiana* 'Alba'.

Her reputation continued to grow so what caused her not to attend the RHS event of October 1897 to receive her award? Lawrence's contention is that this was the result of the abrupt truncation of a very close relationship with a female friend through the latter's sudden marriage, about which Ellen had had no prior knowledge/warning. It seems that there was a marked change in Ellen's character at this juncture and she had begun to earn a different kind of reputation - 'gardening's bad girl.'

Now the mistress of Warley Place and with money still being no object, she resumed the development of the garden indulging her passion for collecting and cultivating plants in the many glasshouses, some of which were heated, and adding other facilities such as a conservatory, an irrigation system and a large boating lake. Large numbers of bulbs such as snowdrops and daffodils were planted to form naturalistic drifts of blossom when they flowered. Supporting her in these endeavours were her gardeners, 100 of them led by the head gardener, the herbaceous foreman and the alpine foreman. She was a demanding employer, apparently.

Financial difficulties marked her later life. Her two overseas' properties, each with beautiful gardens created by Ellen, were disposed of. Warley Place remained her home as she led an increasingly eccentric and paranoid lifestyle walking back from engagements in the locality with her tiara in a brown paper bag; keeping a revolver in her handbag and a brass knuckleduster in a drawer; and, it is said, sprinkling the seeds of an invasive prickly sea holly, *Eryngium giganteum*, in the gardens of fellow horticulturalists. The story goes that so widely known did this habit become that the plant was nicknamed 'Miss Willmott's Ghost.'



Ellen Willmott died at home in 1934 aged 76. The house was sold and, in 1939, demolished. The estate was later designated a protected green area (the 'green belt') with no development permitted, thus allowing a 'natural' rewilding of the garden to take place. Since 1977, an area of 16 acres has been leased and gradually brought up to its present standard as a nature reserve by the Essex Wildlife Trust but still retaining as many as possible of the features of the original garden. A dedicated group of Warley Place volunteers continues to discover more of the latter whilst thoughtfully stabilising and maintaining those ruins already revealed.



There is indeed lots to see of the garden - each item carefully described in an information board placed alongside it and lots to imagine. The old walled garden still with a few of its original plants; a raised pond in the labyrinth of ruined hothouses; underground boiler rooms; steps leading down to the boating lake - without water though because of the drought in this part of England; the ruined conservatory - the only part of Warley Place still standing and today surrounded by wildflowers and woodland. There are few signs of the masterpiece, the alpine garden, though it is probably buried under years of accumulated leaf mould and off-limits anyway because of hidden dangers. There are still some 140 different types of trees to be found on the reserve including a stand of Spanish Chestnuts planted by the family and, in the Spring, one can enjoy the swathes of yellow daffodils.

So, the legacy of Miss Willmott lives on - in harmony with the rewilding and with the natural habitats which allow the native wildlife to thrive.

Footnote:

Just as an aside and nearer to home... Apart from all her other accomplishments, Ellen was skilled in the art of ornamental turning, the centuries-old practice of decorating lathe-turned objects with complex patterns. Ornamental lathes have been around since about 1600 AD, and they represent the pinnacle of lathe design and engineering. Fine tropical woods, such as the locally-found *Dalbergia melanoxylon* (*Mpingo*/African Blackwood), are utilised for the bodies of many ornamental turnings.

Sources:

A prickly customer, *Anne de Courcy*. The Spectator, 17 May 2022; Miss Willmott's Ghosts: The extraordinary life and gardens of a forgotten genius, *Sandra Lawrence*, 2022; A short history of Warley Place, *Essex Wildlife Trust webpage*; Ellen Willmott, *Wikipedia*. Photo: Fiona Lloyd, 2022.

NCD Monthly Events Report

KENYA HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY



North Coast District held four events in the fourth quarter of 2022.

On **25 October**, more than 40 NCD members and gardeners gathered in the forecourt of the Balletto home in Malindi. Following coffee and delicious bitings, Pauline addressed our members and explained how her garden was created and what developments have occurred in the garden since then.



She emphasised that the garden was a collection of plants, some quite rare, and contained both exotics and indigenous plants and trees. Pauline led a walk around the garden for those who wanted more information about the planting, but members were free to follow their own paths in their own time, to enjoy the peace and the tranquillity of the garden, and to discover plants known and unknown, familiar and unfamiliar, some mature and astonishingly large, some newly planted, dry plants that will tolerate Malindi's increasingly reduced rainfall, and longer, hotter dry seasons.

On 29th November, while many members were learning how, where, when and why to plant trees and shrubs, Nicola Morrell squeezed 15 members through rigorous security into the

KEMRI research station on a hillside above Kilifi. Seventeen years ago, Nicola was asked to plant up large concrete troughs outside each plate glass window in the new buildings on this hilly site. Had she been asked at that stage to landscape the whole place, which was still under construction and on very uneven ground, she would have refused. Fortunately, requests were added at manageable intervals and now the buildings and walkways nestle among lushly abundant shrubs and ground cover, beneath the shade of towering trees. Nicky divulged that she has unlimited access to borehole water, which explains the magnificent height of trees no more than seventeen years old. Her creativity is evident and she enthuses two very competent gardeners, who helped to show us round.



On the same day, NCD also held a teaching and practical demonstration event in Watamu, with the theme of 'how to properly plant a tree'. The event was attended

by 27 NCD members, more than 60% of whom were gardeners, who were indeed the target audience for this instructional training session. The event was led by Aasit Shah, CEO of Organix, who delivered a very informative and interesting talk about the key aspects of soil preparation for all new planting, and whose team then led the practical demonstration of how to plant a tree, in this case, a young coconut, which we hope will be bearing fruit in just 5 years time.



And on 25 December, more than 20 NCD members boarded the Turtle Bay Beach Club dhow for a midday cruise on Mida Creek, complete with Christmas lunch and a healthy ration of sailors' 'rum'. As usual the cruise included a pause for some synchronised swimming behind the dhow. Lunch was, as ever, a traditional offering of turkey and all the trimmings.



Diary of upcoming NCD events



24 January 2023 - A remarkable shamba on the boundary of the forest.



Members are invited to visit a very interesting newly established shamba or market garden on the border of the Arabuko Sokoke Forest. The shamba is run by one of NCD's newest members, Bob van der Bijl, and is located off the Tsavo Road in a beautiful wide-skies location, and very easy to access. Bob has planted a large crop of passion fruit along with other fruits and vegetables, and Organix are conducting some planting and treatments on the shamba that add interest. This is one not to be missed.



21 February 2023 - A Gardening Event with Marion Langham

Always popular with members, and always offering new surprises, lots of learning opportunities, usually a plant sale and a chance to socialize with other members, Marion Langham will host a gardening event for us in February in Kilifi. We shall of course share details of the location of the event and timings etc with members nearer the time. All **very** exciting!

28 March 2023 - The North Coast District AGM in Watamu



Perhaps the most important meeting of the year will be held at the Turtle Bay Beach Club in Watamu. Our AGM is the meeting at which you our members choose your committee to serve you through the next year, examine the finances, discuss NCD charitable projects, and meet other members. We shall have a key-note speaker, and the AGM will be followed by a members' lunch at the Turtle Bay beach Club for those members who wish to stay on and socialize with other members. This is definitely one for your diary!

KHS North Coast District



North Coast District Contacts

Chairman **Mr Crispin Sharp**
sharpcrispin@hotmail.com

Hon Sec This post remains open

Hon Treasurer **Mr Rupert Partridge**
rdpartridge@gmail.com

NCD MPESA 0702 767 177

NCD Shop To be announced.

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INTRODUCE A FRIEND TO THE KENYA HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY AND HELP US DOUBLE THE CURRENT MEMBERSHIP IN OUR CENTENARY YEAR!

SHARE THE PLANT LOVE TODAY...

KENYA HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY
Gardening Kenya



To join the **KHS North Coast District WhatsApp group**, please contact **Crispin Sharp** on **0798 902 442** and ask to be added to the group.

KHS merchandise



KHS 2023 Calendars

KHS has produced two calendars as part of its centenary merchandising, one a desk calendar featuring Kenyan gardens, and the other a hanging calendar celebrating Kenyan trees.

Both are available within our district and if you have not yet already purchased your 2023 calendars and would like a KHS one, then they will be available at our January meeting, or can be ordered from Holly Pritchett on 0722 244 256.

The calendars are 400 shillings each, desktop or hanging, same price.



