The
SHAMBA TIMES
Journal of The North Coast District, Kenya Horticultural Society

WINTER 2017 VOLUME 4, ISSUE 4

Chairman's Notes

Year's end is traditionally a good time to review the past and look to the future, however neither task sits easily on my shoulders. Nationally, the Country endured extreme drought early in the year leading to violent unrest and land invasions in several locations and then the second half was dominated by the bizarre and disruptive double presidential election. Despite this, we at North Coast managed to maintain a full programme of events, culminating in the Kilifi Garden Festival.

Generally, I believe this was a successful and enjoyable weekend though, in retrospect, I'm still not sure that we have found the right format for our main event of the year. I am however in no doubt that dispensing with a formal flower show was the right decision. Despite having a healthy membership, we don't have the necessary interest and support to stage a viable show and I suspect most other Districts have similar problems, though judging from the excellent photos on the KHS website, the Nairobi show looked very impressive. However, as most of the clips are of large presentations, some clearly commercial, it is difficult to evaluate the event as a whole.

The feedback from our show was universally positive but suggestions for improvement varied considerably and some people questioned the non-horticultural nature of some of the exhibitors. My own view is that having a large selection of attractions was more important than what they were selling, and it seems likely that we exposed the KHS to a number of people who might otherwise have

not come to the event. The competitions and show gardens which we organised were very well received and the 'kids zone' also worked well but, if we do put on another show next year, we need to reconsider staging it over two days and probably defer the lectures to be single events of their own.

(Continued on page 12)

The Kilifi Garden Festival - Chris Betts reports

This year's main event for the North Coast District was the Kilifi Garden Festival, held over the weekend of 25th/26th November 2017. Under the leadership of our Chairman, Marion Langham, the event was designed to be an alternative to the annual flower shows, which were judged to have withered into poorly supported and poorly attended occasions, requiring a lot of effort by a small core of people, for very little return.

The new format was based on presenting something more like a village fête with a mix of stalls, exhibitions, and entertainment. What resulted was a show with 50 widely different exhibitors, a number of easy to enter competitions, some fun for the children, and three illustrated talks by interesting people. As usual, the Mnarani Club Conference area proved to be a good location and the decision to hire tents to protect the outside stalls from the hot November sun was a wise one. The 28 page give away Festival Programme attracted advertisers from as far afield as Nairobi and as diverse as the local butcher to the Diamond Trust Bank.

Browns Cheese made a popular return with their tasty samples whilst prudent visitors were able to take advantage of Car & General's lawn mower clinic. Chocoholics, of course, made for the Sweet Art stand leaving the orchidophiles to see what Nick Conway had managed to bring in from Asia. As always, the District shop had a fine collection of clay pots on display and our fresh flower stand offered beautiful roses and other blooms, generously donated by three growers up country.

As usual, the wheelbarrow competition was a popular event with much imagination being evident in the displays but it was the Crazy Hat competition that really caught peoples attention. Trying to distinguish between the public's acclaim proved too close to call so First prize was shared between three creative hatters.

Amongst the displays were three show gardens. Boniface and Rama stripped Rupert's garden and put on a luxuriant display of Bromeliads whilst Vanessa and Holly from Malindi made a 'wet' garden of ferns and bog plants surrounding a pond, complete with flowing stream. Nearby, Katana Baya, John's gardener, constructed a beautiful dry garden of succulents and cacti, dressed about with pebbles

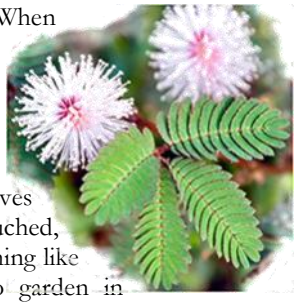
Silas Njibwakale, Deputy General Manager of the Sotik Tea Company Ltd, led off the speakers with a presentation about tea production in Kenya. Then, in the afternoon, Carissa Nightingale gave an interesting and amusing account of her parents', May and Clarence Buxton, pioneering taming of the forests at Kinuni. Finally, our friend, Dino Martins, entertained us on Sunday morning by showing us how much we depend upon insects for our daily bread.

In the end, some 300 or so visitors came to the show and, from what could be judged, most exhibitors were content with their day. However, whether the show becomes a regular event remains to be decided.

A Garden Festival Kaleidoscope


Garden Festival
Highly Commended

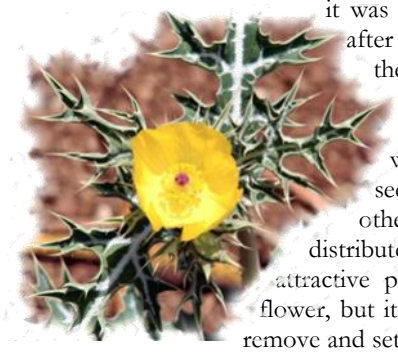
Invasive plants in my garden – some I love, some I hate. by Marion Langham

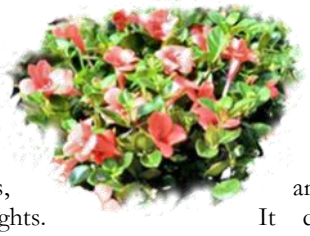


Let me start with *Mimosa pudica*. When I lived and gardened in Northern Ireland, this was a plant I loved to try and grow, but it never thrived. I liked it because it was different. It is a sensitive plant, that is to say the compound leaves shrink away and close when touched, and I had never come across anything like that before. When I started to garden in Kenya I was delighted to find it again and of course brought it home. Because I thought it was a delicate plant I kept it in a pot and nurtured it – in no time whatsoever the plant outgrew the pot, threw seeds wherever it could, and I was being invaded. *Mimosa pudica* is no long part of our happy family!

Antigonon leptopus was another 'must have' when we started our garden on Bofa. That didn't last long. It is lovely when viewed from afar, is fast growing, and even covers coral within the reach of sea spray - all good points – but we found it was taking over the garden and then discovered that, once it became established, it was virtually impossible to remove, so we decided to admire it from afar! In Florida it is categorized as invasive species and listed as Category II (invasive exotic).

Back to my childhood on our farm in Tanzania. *Argemone Mexicana* was a weed there but I decided I would like to give it a try in the garden – perhaps being a little home sick for the slopes of Kilimanjaro. I bought the seeds, planted them, and eventually they began to grow. They were rather sickly plants and I didn't think they would survive but one did and for a time it was my pride and joy. Then after many months the part of the garden beside the sea where I had planted the single *Argemone Mexicana* was infested with seedlings, some tiny but others about to flower and distribute more seeds. It is an attractive plant even if it is not in flower, but it is so prickly it is hard to remove and sets seeds so abundantly that I decided I would live with the memory only. *Argemone Mexicana* is being farmed as a dry land crop for biodiesel production (the oil is poisonous) and has wide use in traditional medicine. A recent study shows effectiveness in the treatment of Malaria.





Barleria repens is an invasive friend that will grow anywhere. It is very drought tolerant and it is easily removed. It is happy to cover unsightly walls, and even climb them to great heights. It doesn't flower profusely but it does have a few flowers all the time. It will pop up all anywhere to the point of being invasive.

When we arrived in Kilifi and the garden was still a building site, I was watching out for flowers that I might introduce and noticed this white, sometimes pink flower. It was so cheerful that I felt it would be a great addition to the garden. Eventually I found a few plants and they became established. Then a new friend came to visit and noticed what I learned was *Catharanthus roseus*. 'Oh my goodness' was her remark when she saw my treasures growing so happily, 'You have lavatory plants in the garden'. The poor things sort of lost some of their appeal to me, although they are still in the garden. We let them grow where we want to see them. *Catharanthus roseus* reseeds abundantly, grows easily, and is a plant that I highly recommend to fill the garden with colour, especially in the very hot dry periods when all else apart from the bougainvillea struggles. *Catharanthus roseus* has been used to treat many different ailments from wasp stings to a cure for diabetes, tuberculosis and malaria. J. A Duke's Handbook of Medicinal Herbs 1985 and Medicine of Plants 1993 tells us that *Catharanthus roseus* has saved thousands of children suffering from leukemia.

Rivinia humilis is another beauty that has become a pest. I started with one seedling, and at the time I bought the plant I was warned that it could become invasive. It is an attractive, delicate looking plant with small white flowers and masses of red berries, making a great low maintenance ground cover. It grows in full shade or filtered sunlight; it does not need watering and is tolerant to salt spray and saline soil. I wouldn't be without it, but we pull wheelbarrows of this from the garden weekly

I have never been one for letting vines and creepers grow up trees, although latterly I have started to allow this. *Epipremnum aureum* was first introduced to me in London as a house plant that was easy to grow, as long as it was not overwatered. Arriving in Kilifi I noticed these huge leaves growing up trees that were identical to the small leaved plants I had nurtured in London and discovered to my amazement that they were one and the same plant. *Epipremnum* is a *hemiepiphyte* and in the wild it begins life as a small leaved plant on the forest floor but; when given a chance, it climbs up trees, walls, or anything it can adhere to. Then the heart shape leaves become huge reaching up to 3 feet across.

In Northern Australia; Sri Lanka, and other countries it is causing ecological problems as it is so invasive. The Florida Exotic Pest Control Council 1999 lists it as an invasive species. All parts of the plant are toxic to humans, cats and dogs.

Christmas Glitter - a day in Watamu by Chris Betts

No one can say we don't have variety in our programme of events here at the North Coast. Our December meeting was a sparkling affair set against the backdrop of Christmas Decorations. Hosted by Mike and Annie Norton-Griffiths, some eighteen or so members gathered at The Blue House to take part in a round table forum of people presenting their ideas for turning garden debris into decoration.

Fantastic imagination was shown by everyone, particularly Marion Langham, Annie Norton-Griffiths, and Sue Lawrence-Brown. Many of the ideas were incredibly simple, just needing a snip of tinsel or splash of silver paint to transform it into a pretty tree bauble. Shells, sticks, paper, and plants were fashioned into all sorts of wonderful things.

Afterwards the meeting drifted easily into a relaxed and convivial picnic, seated around Annie's outside dining table. A good selection of salads and snacks had been brought along and, in the spirit of Christmas, the KHS sprung to a glass of wine for everyone, so people stayed and chatted till the falling sun reminded them it was time to go, taking with them a host of ideas to put into practice when they got home.

Sodium Strategies - by Ruth Vaughan

In Africa, and especially in Kenya, sodium is one of the major causes of yield losses, quality reduction and crop failure in irrigated agriculture. Soils with a high percentage of sodium in the soil are called **sodic soils**. Sodic soils negatively impact plant growth for several reasons:-

- Specific ion toxicity to sodium sensitive plants.
- Nutrient deficiencies or imbalances in the plants.
- High soil pH – resulting in lock up of phosphates, iron and other micronutrients.
- Dispersion of clay and silt particles in the soil – collapsing the soil structure and blocking soil pores.

Where does soil sodium come from? In low rainfall areas with high evaporation, like many parts of Kenya, sodium and other salts build up in the soil surface over time. This effect is rapidly enhanced due to over grazing, which removes the plant cover and compacts the soil, reducing water infiltration and causing a salt build up. In coastal areas sodium comes from sea spray and sea salt in the rain. Irrigating the soil with water containing high sodium is a major cause of high soil sodium in Kenya. It is important to identify the root cause of the sodium build up so you can deal with it. If you are irrigating, the **FIRST** thing to test is the water quality, with an irrigation water analysis.

High sodium levels compete with calcium, potassium and magnesium for uptake by plant roots. Some plants are very sensitive to sodium including potatoes, beans, woody plants, vines and stone fruits. Sodium toxicity can be seen as necrosis of leaf tips and plant yellowing like these tomato plants in Thika, and onions in Naivasha.

Long before you see the classic toxicity symptoms in the plant leaves – you will notice the plants struggling with high pest and disease pressure. Spidermite infestations are very often associated with high sodium. Death of plants from Fusarium is very common in sodic soils. To reduce sodium toxicity plant sodium tolerant plant species or sodium tolerant varieties. Don't struggle with sodium sensitive plants in high sodium soils – you will never win.

Tolerance to sodium	Crops	Growth response
Extremely sensitive (ESP 2-10)	Deciduous Fruits Nuts Citrus Avocado	Sodium toxity symptoms evenat low ESP values
Sensitive (ESP 10-20)	Beans	Stunted growth at these ESP values even though the physical condition
Moderately tolerant (ESP 20-40	Clover (Trifolium spp.) Oats (Avena saliva L.) Tall fescue Rice (Oryza saliva L.)	Stunted growth due to both nutritional factors and adverse soil conditions
Tolerant (ESP 40-60)	Dallisgrass (Paspalum dilatum Poir.) Wheat (Triticum aestivum L.) Cotton (Gossypium hirsutum L.) Alfafa (Medicago sativa L.) Barley (Hordeum vulgare L.) Tomatoes Beet, garden (Beta vulgaris l.)	Stunted growth, usually due to adverse physical conditions of soil
Most tolerant (ESP >60)	Crested and Fairway wheatgrass Tall wheatgrass Rhodes grass	Stunted growth, usually due to adverse physical conditions of soil

Soil nutrient imbalances, high pH soil and soil structure can all be improved by getting a complete soil analysis and looking at the cation (positive ions) percentages. The soil correction recommendations will help reduce the sodium in the soil, improve the soil structure and address nutrient imbalances. Ideally this should be done before you plant, but you can still do this in long term crops like roses, while the plants are still growing.

Sodium levels are reported as exchangeable sodium percentage (ESP. At an ESP of 5% the soil structure starts to break down, and water infiltration reduces. As water infiltration reduces, the sodium quickly builds up, creating a rapid upward spiral in sodium levels and a fast collapse of soil properties and plant health. At an ESP of 15%, pretty much everything goes wrong and the soil is very difficult and very expensive to rehabilitate. The earlier you deal with sodium the better.

The effect of sodium on soil structure depends on the amount of clay or silt in the soil. The cation exchange capacity (CEC) gives an indication of soil type. Heavy soils with a high clay content and fine silty soils like those in the Rift Valley, are

Sodium Strategies - continued

highly affected by sodium. The sodium attaches to the soil particles making them repel each other. This disperses the soil and breaks down the soil crumb structure. These small particles move in the soil water and block the soil pores that are so important for root growth, gaseous exchange (oxygen in

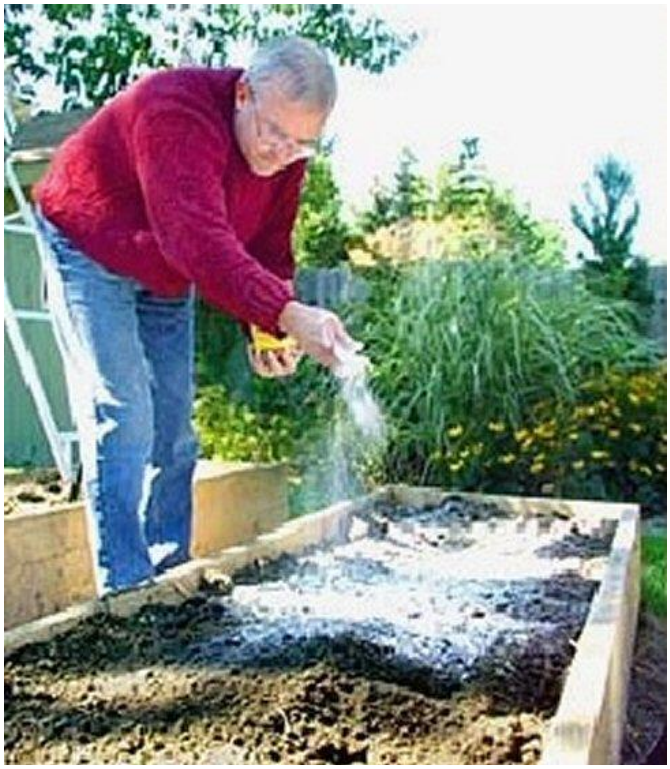
and carbon dioxide out) and water movement.

Sodium builds up when water cannot infiltrate easily through the soil. Dig soil pits in your fields to look for a hard pans or concrete layers that prevent water movement and salt leaching. Hard pans are more common in clay based soils, concrete layers in silty soils. **These compacted layers need to be physically broken up by deep ripping or deep digging**, to shatter, without turning the soil over and burying the valuable topsoil. You cannot remove sodium without leaching which needs free water movement through the soil profile.

Adding **organic matter** and humic/fulvic acids will improve the soil crumb structure, increasing the water infiltration rate and leaching potential of the sodium. **Mulching** the surface will reduce evaporation and soil capping. Keeping **active plant roots** and crop residues in the field will further improve soil structure and water infiltration. **Building high beds** will improve water infiltration and movement of salts away from the root zone. **Irrigating with slow drip irrigation** will reduce evaporation and improve water infiltration. Large rain droplets and overhead sprinklers will increase soil capping through physical action.

Your soil analysis results will have a soil fertility correction recommendation, which tells you the right amount of gypsum to apply. The gypsum can be mixed into the soil at planting or surface applied in the case of permanent crops like roses, coffee and fruit trees. If you cannot afford to apply the gypsum in one go, you can plan the application over a year or two. However the sooner you can apply, the sooner your yields will improve.

How does gypsum work? The calcium in the gypsum has a higher attraction to the negatively charged soil particles than the sodium and 'kicks' the sodium off into the soil solution where it can be leached out. The calcium improves the crumb structure of the soil, counteracting the soil dispersion and



improving water infiltration, allowing the water with the sodium to leach out.

Dispersed sodic soils repel water when dry and block up when wet. The EC of the applied water affects its ability to 'wet' sodic soil and penetrate the soil structure, fertigation with fertilized water with a higher EC is better than applying fresh water. Keep a fine layer of gypsum on the soil surface at all times, this improves wettability and brings in extra calcium to counteract the sodium. You can also add specialized dispersing agents like humic acids and liquid soaps.

If you are concerned about sodium in your soil, I hope by now that you have had a look at previous soil analysis results or have organized for a proper soil analysis to be done by contacting us on support@cropnuts.com. To look for gypsum or salinity correction products please consult our online product directory http://shambaza.com

Ruth Vaughan is the Technical Director at Crop Nutrition Laboratory Services Ltd. (CROPNUTS). Ruth is also a contributing author to Kenya's leading horticulture magazines such as the HortFresh Journal, HortiNews and Floriculture.

Kigelia Africana, The Sausage tree - by Amy Grant.

The bignonia family is a captivating tropical family consisting of many vines, trees and shrubs. Of these, the only species that occurs throughout tropical Africa is *Kigelia africana* or the sausage tree.

Kigelia is found from Eritrea and Chad south to northern South Africa and west to Senegal and Namibia. It is a tree that can grow up to 66 feet (20 m) in height with smooth, grey bark on juvenile trees that peels as the tree matures. In areas of plentiful rainfall, the Kigelia is an evergreen. In areas of scant rain, it is deciduous. The leaves are pinnate, 12-20 inches (30-50 cm) in length and 2 ¼ inches (6 cm) wide. set in whorls of three.

The most interesting thing about Kigelia is the blossoms and resulting fruit. The blood-red flowers bloom at night on long, ropey stalks that dangle from the limbs of the tree. They release an unpleasant aroma that bats find very appealing. Bats, insects, and birds feed on the nectar rich blooms which are in turn pollinated by the visitors.

The fruit, actually a berry, droops down from long stalks. Each mature fruit may grow up to 2 feet long (0. 6 m) and weigh up to 15 pounds (6. 8 kg)! The common name for Kigelia comes from the look of the fruit, as some say they look like large sausages dangling from the tree.

The fruit is fibrous and pulpy with many seeds and is toxic to humans. However, many types of animals including baboons, bushpigs, elephants, giraffes,

hippos, monkeys, porcupines, and parrots enjoy the fruit.,

In some tropical regions, this tree is grown as an ornamental for its lovely glossy dark green foliage, erect to spreading low canopy, and fantastic flowers and fruit. It can be grown in sunset zones 16-24 in well-draining soil composed of clay, loam or sand and in full sun. Soil should have a pH that is slightly acidic to neutral. Once the tree has established, it requires little additional care and can potentially delight and amaze generations, as it can live from 50 to 150 years.

By kind permission of Gardening Know How

Ask Maude

Q. *At first glance my cactus looks rather pretty but I fear all is not well. Can you please tell me what is wrong with it and what to do about it?*

A. Your cactus is a *Coryphantha elephantidens* and it has a bad case of rust. Rusts are a group of pathogenic fungi of which there are over 7000 species. They are highly specialised parasites with several unique features. Unlike other plant pathogens, rusts usually affects healthy and vigorously growing plants. On the whole, they seldom kills established plants but can cause malformation and stunted growth.

The group is considered one of the most harmful pathogens to agriculture, horticulture, and forestry. These fungi are major concerns and limiting factors for successful cultivation of agricultural and forestry crops. White pine blister rust, wheatstem rust, and coffee rust are examples of notoriously damaging and economically important rusts

Here at the coast, the most usual victims of rust are the Frangipani trees, where the underside of the leaves get covered in orange dust. Once established, it is very hard to treat and the only option is to carefully gather infected parts and burn them. I really don't know how you save your little family of cacti.

Prevention is best achieved by avoiding overwatering and hot humid conditions though spraying with a sulphur based fungicide can help.

Q *Dear Maude. Please can you help. I can't understand what it happening to my lawn. After all the rain we have had my grass was looking so good, now suddenly I find patches of grass which seems to be dying and I can't understand why this should happen when the rest of the lawn looks so good. Francis*

A In last the last issue of the Shamba times there was an article regarding Fall Armyworm. I think if you look carefully in the dying grass, you will find there are lots of caterpillars eating away at the stems. They are very difficult to get rid of but spraying with with Voliam Targo by Syngenta works quite well

Organic Farming

Organic farming is a way to promote healthy food as well as improving productivity. Organic farmers do not use chemicals; they rely on good management and biological methods. Organic farming increases soil organic matter and the high levels of organic matter in soil produces crops with a greater ability to resist insect pests and diseases. As well as this, the soil is better able to cope with drought and flooding. The other important aspect of organic farming is it helps to protect the birds and bees.

Organic farming practices improve soil quality and water quality and retention and nurture more active soil microbial communities that retain nitrogen in the soil longer and transform it into non- leachable gaseous forms. By improving the soil quality, organic farming influences a crop's ability to withstand or repel insect attack and plant disease.

Organic Farming Practice	Environmental benefits
Crop rotation	Improves soil quality, disrupts weed, insect, and disease life cycles, captures carbon and nitrogen, diversifies production (can have market benefits)
Manure, compost, green manure use	Improves soil quality, captures carbon and nitrogen, contributes to productivity
Cover cropping	Improves soil quality, reduces erosion, captures carbon and nitrogen, prevents dust (protects air quality), improves soil nutrients, and contributes to productivity
Avoidance of synthetic fertilizers	Avoids contamination of surface and ground waters, improves soil quality, captures carbon, mitigates salinization (in many cases)
Avoidance of synthetic pesticides	Improves biodiversity, improves water quality, improves soil quality, assists in effective pest management, prevents disruption of pollinators, reduces costs of chemical inputs
Planting habitat corridors, borders, and/ or insectaries	Improves biodiversity, supports biological pest management, provides wildlife habitat
Buffer areas	Improves water quality, improves biodiversity, prevents wind erosion

Organic farming is specifically designed to grow food without the use of toxic substances. Exposure to chemicals used in agriculture has been linked to cancer in many parts of the body including the brain and central nervous system, breast, colon, lungs, ovaries, pancreas, kidneys, testes, and stomach, according to the U. S. Dept. of Health and Human Services' President's Cancer Panel's 2010 report. By not applying toxic synthetic pesticides, fungicides, and herbicides, organic farmers do not contribute to these health issues.

Ya mgambo

Uklima hai ni njia ya kufanya chakula chenye afya sawa na kuendeleza uzalishaji. Wakulima hai huongeza uzalishaji. Wakulima hai hawatumii kemikali: hutegemea usimamizi bora wa mbinu za kibaiolojia. Ukulima hai huongeza uhai mchangani na viwango vya juu kwenye mchanga husababisha mbegu kuwa na uwezo wa kudhibiti wadudu na maradhi: sawa na haya, mchanga una uwezo kukabili ukame na mafuriko. Jambo lengine muhimu kwa ukulima hai ni kuwa unasaidia kulinda ndege na nyuki.

MAZOEI YA KILIMO HAI	FAIDA KIMAZINGIRA
Mzunguko wa mbegu	Huboresha udongo, huvuruga magugu (kwekwe) wadudu, magonjwa, hunasa kaboni na naitrogeni hutofautisha mazao (huleta soko kibiashara)
Mbolea samadi mbolea taka mbolea kijani kibichi	Huboresha udongo,hunasa kaboni na naitrojeni na huchangia uzalishaji
Mbegu za kufunikwa	Huboresha mchanga, hupunguza mmomonyoko wa udongo, hunasa kaboni na naitrojeni, hupunguza vumbi (hutunza ubora wa hewa), huboresha virutubishi mchangani na kuchangia uzalishaji
Kutotumia mbolea ya kemikali	Huzuia kuchanganyika kwa sakafu na maji ya ardhini, huboresha udongo, hunasa kaboni, hupunguza kiwango cha chumvi ardhini (mara nyingi)
Kutotumia dawa za kemikali	Huboresha bayoanuai, huboresha maji, huboresha udongo, husaidia katika usimamizi bora, usumbufu wa kiopoo (pollinators),inapunguza garama ya pembejeo
Upandaji, sebuleni, kandokando na ndani	Huboresha bayoanuai, husaidia uthabiti bora kibaiolojia, hutoa mazingira ya wanyama pori.
Maeneo yanayopunguza vizuizi (buffer areas)	Huboresha maji,huboresha bayoanuai, hupunguza usumbufu wa hewa (wind erosion)

Ukulima hai umeundwa maalum kukuza chakula bila bidhaa za sumu. Matumizi ya kemikali katika kilimo husababisha saratani sehemu nyingi za mwili hata ubongo na mishipa muhimu, matiti, koo, mapafu, uzazi, nyongo, figo, makende na tumbo kulengana na idara ya afya ya saratani huko ulaya (u.s. dept. Of health and human services presidents cancer panel 2010) ilivyo ripoti. Kwa kutotumia dawa za sumu pesticides, fungicides na herbicides, wakulima hai hawachangii madhara haya ya kiafya.

Blue Halos and Bee Pollinators - Wendy Taylor explains

In their nectar-seeking activities, bees apparently take most of their cues from the colours and petal shapes of flowers and it is the band of colours on the light spectrum where blue graduates into ultraviolet to which they are particularly sensitive. As we know, however, blue is a relatively uncommon colour in flowers.

Yet, what we now know through some fascinating recent research is that, through nano-scale plant architecture, hundreds of species of flowers have come up with an alternative way to 'make' blue - they have evolved the ability to project halos of blue light in order to attract bee pollinators.

How does this 'optical trick' come about? Previous research revealed that tiny ridges on the petals of certain plants could diffract or bend light giving them an iridescent sheen. Further exploration of this effect through new research revealed that, although the architecture of the nano-structures varied significantly from flower to flower, some showing variations in the spacings of their ridges while others showed variations in the heights, all of the flowers within the laboratory experiments gave this iridescent sheen. What has been additionally revealed is that the ridges also scattered blue and ultraviolet light: all the selected flower species under observation thus appeared to have a 'blue halo'. The effect occurs in the ultraviolent part of the optical spectrum which we cannot see but which bees can.

More from the Festival

A barrow of succulents by Kahindi Kahindi

A medley of stands in the main hall

The 'Wet Garden' by Vanessa & Holly

A bee restaurant by Juma James

THE KILIFI GARDEN FESTIVAL 2017

The 'Bromeliad Garden' by Rama & Boniface

'Waiting for the start'

The 'Countryside' flower arrangement by Vicky

The 'Dry Garden' by Katana Baya

The Orchid Hunter by Leif Bersweden (pub. Short Books 2017)

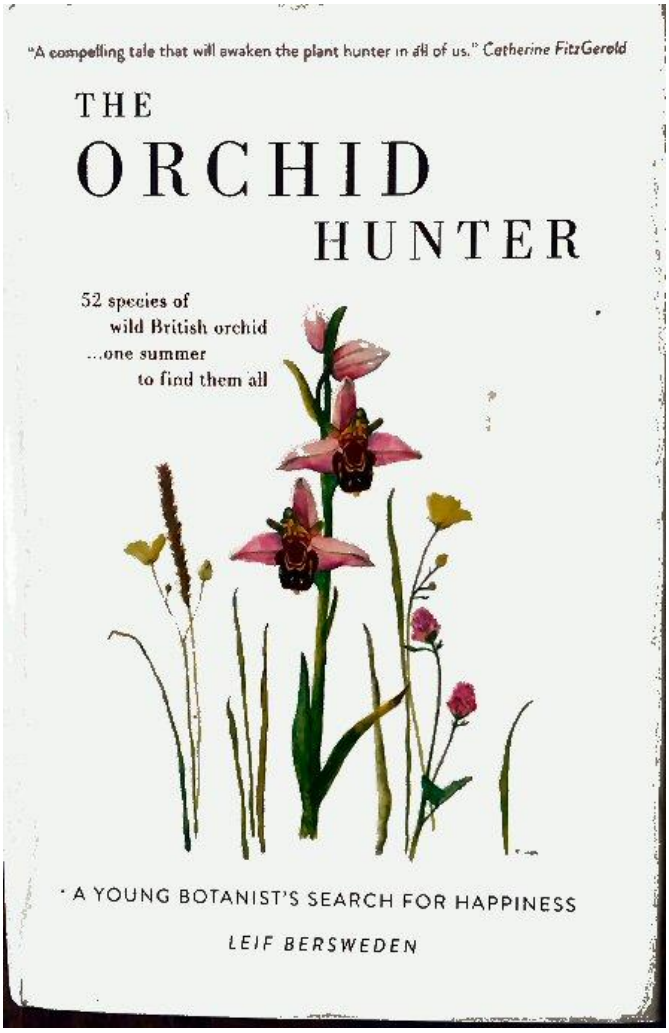
"Orchids have a strange effect on the British. We're drawn by their oddness," writes Isabel Hardman of a species with global appeal. Young botanist Leif Bersweden, currently a PhD student at Kew Gardens, captures that passion in this delightfully warm-hearted book, setting himself the task and succeeding in finding all 52 species of wild British orchids during the five-month summer of 2013.

Many gap-year students sunbathe on tropical beaches. Not Leif who spent his childhood sharing his botanical enthusiasms with his two vicar parents and sisters. Instead, he gets lost in the south Wales dunes near Swansea seeking the elusive Fen

Himantoglossum hircinum -The Lizard Orchid

Orchid, has to walk through the grounds of Salisbury District Hospital to source a gorgeous crop of Bee Orchid and camps in Kent while on the trail of the "smelly" (of goat) Lizard Orchid. Here "the road was lined with Lizard Orchids. Some were short and stunted hidden in the long grass, while others were enormous towers of grey, green and various hues of brown; my favourites were dark chocolate burgundy. I found drooping lizards with tails twisting like fusilli, plants that wagged their tail in the wind like dogs, and some whose tails looked more like the unrolled proboscis of a moth or butterfly."

Who needs Instagram when you can read Leif? This ode to rural Britain propels him 10,000 miles through 48 counties where he takes 50,000 photos, gorgeous plates of each species forming the centre of the book. His anthropomorphising of the orchids -- frogs, bees and monkeys -- is endearing, yet scientific. We learn how each species pollinates and that climate change is increasing the populations and locations of



Lady Orchids and Lizard Orchids, while the elusive Ghost Orchid remains extinct, for now.

In places, Leif's book reads like a new genre, the botanical thriller. Will he find Early Spider Orchids on the Dorset Coast? He does and dances a little jig of excitement. Will Gloucestershire yield a sighting of the incredibly rare Red Helleborine? Yes, though this species is only "hanging on in Britain. For how much longer it is difficult to tell, but the hope remains that this highly sensitive species could suddenly pop up and flower elsewhere in the country. Such is the furtive, capricious enigmatic world of orchids." Indeed.

Belle Nanton

Ophrys apifera The Bee Orchid

Chairman's Notes - continued

One of the big disappointments of the show was the absence of any representation from the KHS Council. Invitations were issued but not taken up. Of course, it's understandable – we live some distance away and getting here is quite costly. So, why do we care? It made no difference to the show. The answer I think is that we need demonstrable evidence that we are part of the Society. At present, it seems that we get very little from our governing body and one is tempted to ask why we bother to belong at all. We pay them KSh50,000 a year to be allowed to buy some quite nice calendars and be told how to run a flower show. Of course, that's not the whole story – belonging to the KHS relieves us of the legal hassles of being a society in Kenya – (and one mustn't forget the website).

But surely, one wants more – we need to feel part of the whole; meet other people; interact with them; see what they are up to – and that's where the problem lies. Even within a District, distance is an obstacle, so thoughts of joint events are largely impractical, not least because of cost. We need a different way to draw the Society together.

Looking at what other groups do, I think it comes down to communication. Websites are not the way to do this. They are a passive media and anyway ours needs drastic improvement if it to gain a regular readership. We need to be proactive and interact directly with our members. Our little Shamba Times does quite well in our District but surely, we should all be reading a Society newsletter, professionally produced and distributed, maybe funded by advertising. Members should know what is being discussed in Council, particularly matters like the Jex Blake garden. I'm not sure about a Society shop but there is probably scope for negotiating discounts and special purchases on behalf of members. We should be maintaining a National membership roll and mailing list. We have a permanent employee now – lets make use of him.

If we can't find a way to make our Society more inclusive and give back something for our subscription, I believe there really is a case for us to do a NCexit and sail under our own colours. What do we have to lose?

Marion

Gallery

Pancratium zeylanicum (Spider white lily) by Wendy Taylor

Ipomoea pes-caprae (Goat's foot) by Wendy Taylor

Moonrise over Bofa beach - Sue Clarke

Nipa fruticans (Mangrove Plam) fruit by Marion Langham

Not all Aloes are aloe vera - Sue Allan

Aloe lateritia var. *graminicola*

In Kenya, we have almost fifty species of Aloe, including three exceedingly poisonous species. Many people have heard of *Aloe vera*, the so -called wonder plant, and mistakenly call all aloes *Aloe vera*. This has caused not just misunderstandings but has had serious consequences. Applying the wrong Aloe on a wound or eating the wrong Aloe can have fatal consequences.

There are three poisonous Aloe species – *Aloe ballyi*, *Aloe elata* and *Aloe ruspoliana*. These species have leaf sap that gives off a strong ratty odour. Fortunately the first two species are relatively rare and not widespread but it is important to know your aloes before attempting to use them medicinally.

Following a presidential ban on the collection of wild-growing aloes, commercial harvesting of aloe sap has taken its place. There is the danger that due to lack of knowledge, this sap could actually be sourced from poisonous aloes.

It's true that the leaves of several species of Aloe are used medicinally and that the roots of *Aloe volkensii*, for example, in combination with other plants, are a significant ingredient for many local brews. But beware! One of our missions in Succulenta East Africa is to raise public awareness that there are dangers out there and that not all aloes have medicinal properties!

Reproduced by kind permission of NatureKenya www.naturekenya.org

For your Diary

JANUARY

DATE TO BE ADVISED

BEEKEEPING ~ DEMO AND TALK

This event keeps on running away from us but the idea is to visit Abas' small holding near Gedi and learn about his beekeeping and vegetable growing activities. Peter Patterson may join us from Nairobi and add his experiences in the field as well.

FEBRUARY

TUESDAY 13TH AT WATAMU
WEDNESDAY 14TH AT MALINDI
THURSDAY 15TH AT KILIFI
FRIDAY 16TH AT VIPINGO

GARDENERS COURSE

Under the new tutelage of Katana Baya and Jonathan Baya and delivered in Swahili, these courses will instruct gardeners on what they should be doing in their gardens in preparation for the arrival of the long rains.

DATE TO BE ARRANGED

ORGANIC GARDENING (PROVISIONAL)

Mr Ammi Israel of Amiran Kenya will talk about the benefits and practicalities of organic horticulture in Kenya

MARCH

DATE TO BE ADVISED

VISIT TO NICK CONWAY'S ORCHID GARDEN

Members who have been before will look forward to a repeat visit to Nick's astonishing display of orchids, set amongst a ghostly maze of *Tillandsia usneoides*

APRIL

DATE TO BE ADVISED

NORTH COAST DISTRICT AGM

Editorial

Year end. Sitting here in my office, looking out over the serried cubicles of the Shamba Times press room, I see weary hacks winding down after the frenzy of the run up to deadline. There by the window, ace newshound Isabel 'Ding-Dong' Nanton lights up her signature cheroot and lazily regales the floor with the details of her latest scoop. Soon the linotype machines on the floor below will have ceased their noisy clatter and the hot lead will cool whilst the compositors tidy up and quench their thirst. Deep in the bowels of the building the roar of the giant presses will die away and the last bundle be sent down the chute to the loading bay. Year end. A moment's peace - and then the whole process will start up anew. Happy New Year.

One always looks back at the start of a new year. I get much pleasure from hearing about the pioneering exploits of some of our early settlers here. When John Golds acquired his plot on Watamu strand the nearest settlement was at Gedi and his house was a three mile hike down the beach from the track head. As Carissa Nightingale explained during her excellent talk at the Garden Festival, her parents selected their plot at Kinuni from a dhow off the coast and then had to cut a mile long track through virgin bush to get to it. Others thought nothing of landing their Tiger Moths on the beach to get to inaccessible spots. All this a mere 60 or so years ago. A bit different now!

One pioneer we were all saddened to lose was Heather Stewart. After an astonishing career of bush flying, often into some really dangerous trouble spots, Heather retired to Kilifi and took up gardening. In no time at all she had transformed her plot into a showpiece which she was glad to let others enjoy. She was an inspired supporter of the North Coast Festivals and built some really imaginative exhibits. Her cheerful presence will be sorely missed. (Members may wish to visit https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/heather-stewart-8wgpczsbb)

cb

KENYA HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY

FIND US ON THE WEB

WWW.KENYAHS.COM

The Shamba Times is published quarterly for the benefit of it's Members by the North Coast District of The Kenya Horticultural Society. Articles for publication are welcome and should be addressed to the Editorial Office, as should any comments, suggestions, or corrections.

The Kenya Horticultural Society was established in 1923 for the purpose of stimulating and increasing interest and knowledge of gardens and plants in Kenya. The North Coast District extends from Vipingo in the South to Malindi in the North. Annual membership is Ksh 1000 per person (Ksh 1300 per couple). Corporate Membership is offered at Ksh 2000. Members gardeners are accepted for limited membership at a fee of Ksh 500 per annum.

M-Pesa payments can be made on 0702 767177

Editorial
The Shamba Times
PO Box 143 - 80108
Kilifi
Kenya

Contact
Mob:- +254 (0)732 610047
marionlangham@googlemail.com