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The Shamba Times

Kenya Horticultural Society North Coast District



North Coast District

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Our cover photo

Our cover photo for this edition of The Shamba Times is of a *Petrea volubilis* and was pictured on the front wall of Malindi Tropical Nurseries, in full bloom.



Petrea is sometimes commonly known as the sandpaper vine ... just rub your hands on the back of a petrea leaf and you will know why. *Petrea volubilis* is an evergreen flowering vine in the family *Verbenaceae* and is an exotic here in Kenya, being native to tropical America.

Cool nights can sometimes encourage this lovely 'tropical wisteria' to bloom, as can dry-season stress followed by rain, as well as day length and intensity. It's a lovely plant, but one that needs a wall or trellis to support it.

TChairman's Notes

Hello everybody, and welcome to the October 2025 edition of The Shamba Times. I am delighted to see that our My Gardening Story feature continues in this edition as we learn about the back stories of two more of our KHS gardener members.

It seems to have been a topsy turvy quarter as far as assaults on the natural beauty of Kenya and nature itself are concerned. There is ongoing concern about events in and around the Karura Forest outside Nairobi. KHS Council has got involved to the extent of sending a letter to KFS and to Friends of Karura Forest to urge them to settle their differences, to work together, and to keep focus on what should be their joint aim of protecting and conserving the forest. Let's see what happens.

Closer to home we were made aware of trees being ripped down close to Bofa Beach in Kilifi in order to construct a road and parking leading down to the beach. There is nothing wrong with installing paved or cabro roads where they are needed or desirable, but does it really have to be done at the expense of the mature trees that could have been saved to provide shade for parking and to create an avenue leading to the beach?

And recently alarm bells sounded from Kuriwitu, where developers from Nairobi have started felling parts of the fragment of indigenous forest, near the Giriama caves. that borders the home and garden of Carissa and Peter Nightingale and where KHS North Coast District has often met to hear talks, to walk the lovely shoreline, and to explore the forest and caves.

All we can do is fight the good fight, and make sure we plant more, much more, than is cut down.

Crispin Sharp

What's up on WhatsApp?

Msitu wa Ndoto

Introduction

We may perhaps be forgiven for feeling a little gloomy about the state of our forests and their future. But this WhatsApp on WhatsUp story emanating from a link posted on the KHS NCD platform in August will surely uplift our spirits!

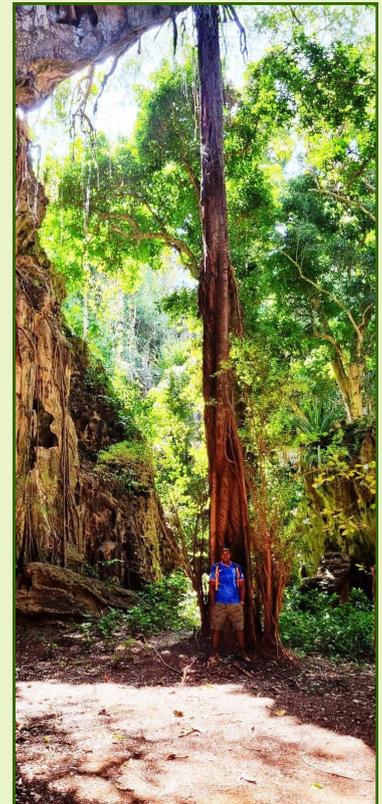
The Story

The story is told by Mara Menzies, a storyteller, author, dreamer, creator, lover of forests, treehouse dweller and, as she relates, founder of *Msitu wa Ndoto* - The Forest of Dreams. With family ties in Kenya, Mara came to Kilifi keen to record local stories and capture indigenous knowledge transmitted in the past by oral tradition but now quickly disappearing; aware of the threats to our coastal forests from mining and farming, and as sources of firewood; and, inspired to develop a sustainable and creative approach to realising the potential of a natural asset, the forest.

But where to pursue her mission? After extensive and lengthy exploration of the Kilifi's hinterland, Mara met Sammy Shoka, the owner of some eight acres of ancient and sacred forest at Panga ya Saidi, which is also an archaeological cave site with an unusually long record of human activities from around 78,000 years ago. Sammy was really the guardian of the forest and the cave but faced challenges in performing this role such as snares being laid, indiscriminate collection of firewood causing trees to be damaged or destroyed, and so forth. As trust built between them, Mara and Sammy decided to create a place where **heritage, art, and nature meet**, preserving the forest, celebrating the stories and traditions that have shaped people's lives, and empowering local communities through novel economic opportunities.

And how to pursue the mission? Through a story-filled adventure path through the forest; interactive sculptures and artworks, inspired by Kenyan histories, myths and folklore, which will pop up throughout the forest; a sky bridge adventure, the first of its kind at the Kenyan coast, with views of the forest canopy; and a planting of 1,000 indigenous trees in and around the forest. Over the past year, they and their team have worked with the *Kaya* sacred forest elders to gather stories and legends; commissioned six sculptures from local artisans; constructed a bridge that safely guides people into the cave; designed the immersive story trail that protects nature while celebrating culture; partnered with the Leaf Charity to establish an indigenous tree nursery; and, set the standard for storytelling by hosting a music, dance, light performance in collaboration with other artistes. Fund-raising continues with Phase 1 of *Msitu wa Ndoto* scheduled to be completed and "ready to go" in December 2025.

This piece is continued on Page 13



My Garden in Kibokoni

I bought my property in Kibokoni, Malindi, in 2022 - by chance. I had gone to view another plot, which proved disappointing, when I noticed a *For Sale* sign outside a walled compound. After arranging a viewing, I knew immediately this was the right place for me.

The land, originally a 5,000 sqm plot shared by two Italian friends, already held mature trees: neem, mango, flamboyant, one large acacia, and four magnificent baobabs. Apart from grass and a scattering of bougainvillea along the boundary walls, there was little else.



After some renovations and the addition of a pool, I turned my attention to the garden. Coming from dry Laikipia, where water was always scarce, I was eager to create something lush and tropical. At first, I worked with a landscape designer who planted grass, a few shrubs, and palms - fishtail, umbrella, and Christmas palms - while repositioning some lilies and existing palms. It was a beginning, but I soon wanted to take it further myself.

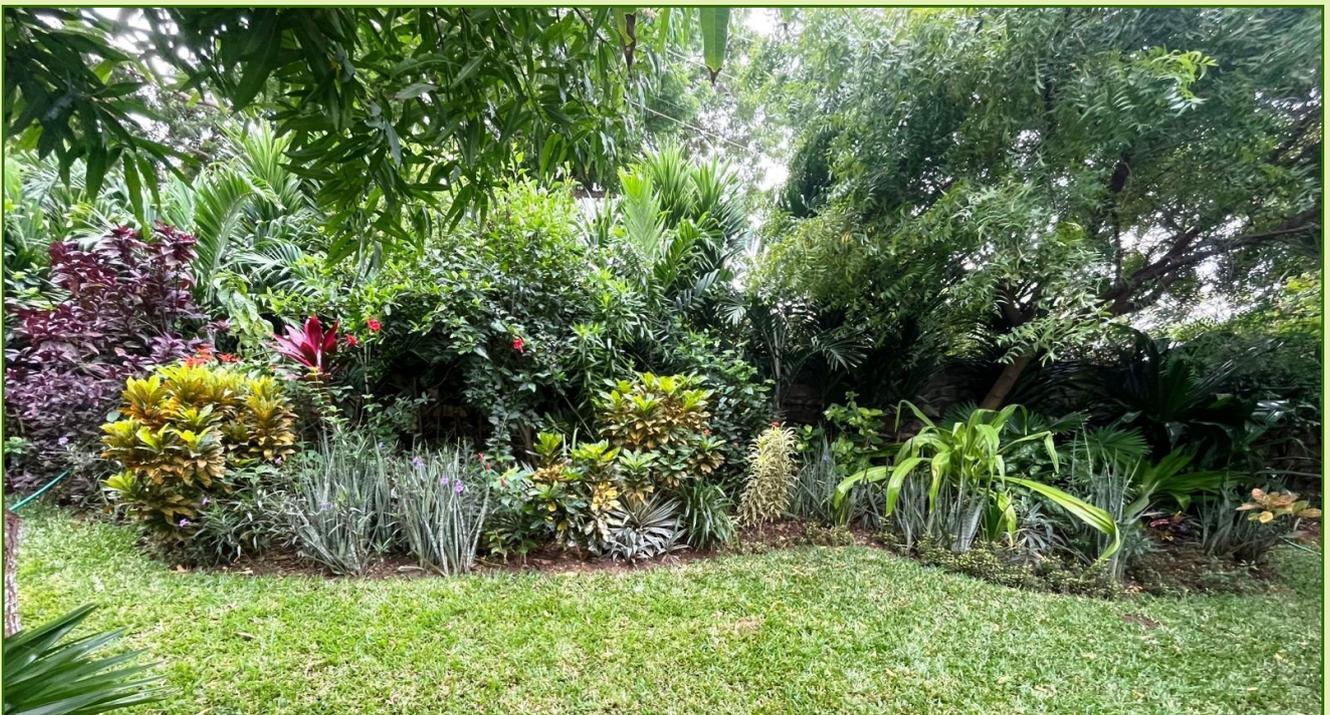


Joining the Kenya Horticultural Society North Coast District (KHS NCD) gave me the inspiration and knowledge I needed. Garden visits, professional talks, and the lively WhatsApp group offered fresh ideas and practical advice. Slowly, I began designing one side of the property, focusing on a green barrier between the two houses. I experimented with plants for height, colour, and coverage, using draecena as a reliable backdrop while testing what thrived in Malindi's coastal conditions.

By Maike Potgeiter

Composting, a practice I had relied on in Laikipia, quickly became essential. Within months I had rich compost to mix with manure, improving the soil and feeding my growing collection of plants.

Once the barrier had taken shape, I turned to the far end of the garden, where a store and staff room stood. To soften this area, I created a curving bed along the wall and filled it with trees and shrubs, many sourced from Norbert Rottcher's nursery. Knowing how fierce the sun is from December to April, I also planted shade trees from both Norbert and Ann Robertson, which are already casting welcome cover.



In time, I discovered the joy of attracting wildlife into the garden. Birds, butterflies, and even the occasional squirrel now find shelter among the trees and flowering shrubs. Their presence brings movement and life that no amount of planting alone could achieve. I've also begun thinking carefully about succession planting - ensuring that at any given time, something is in bloom, offering nectar and colour. This rhythm of growth and renewal has deepened my connection to the space. What began as chance ownership has become a relationship, teaching me patience, observation, and gratitude every day.

My garden continued ...

Over the seasons, I have added palms in pots, placing them around the house and garden for contrast and a sense of movement. With each passing year, the space grows fuller, greener, and more alive.



The garden continues to evolve. I keep learning, planting, and sometimes replanting, always guided by inspiration from KHS talks and visits. What started as a modest project has blossomed into a true passion. My garden is no longer just the setting for a house - it has become a sanctuary, a place of discovery, and a source of endless joy.



A Clarion Call - by Peter Derry

This is a clarion call to anyone interested in uplifting the appreciation and love of nature. There's a global database of species called *iNaturalist*. It's a great site for digging into a species you've seen and trying to identify exactly what it is. There are distribution maps, taxonomy and often it's full of interesting details.



Anyone can set up an account and post pictures of what they've seen or help others identify what they're struggling to identify. When two people have agreed what it is, it is then classed "Research Grade". But here's the rub: there's lots of people reviewing birds but the plants are sadly neglected. As an example, check out <https://inaturalist.ca/observations/kilimandege>. Over 150 species of various taxa with a good portion of the birds and mammals showing as "Research Grade" but the plants only have a few that have been confirmed. *Hibiscus cannabinus*, as illustrated, is one such example of the latter, while *Gloriosa superba* is just sitting there unattended!

But, for a good example of how it can work well, check out the bitter-apple *Solanum campylacanthum*. I'd negligently posted using the common name Sodom Apple, but that's used for several species and it went up as *Solanum linnaeanum*. Thankfully, some kind person disagreed and offered an alternative that was correct. This is the point: for this to work it needs people to post, preferably having some idea of what they're on about but not necessarily being spot on, and some to help identify things by either agreeing or suggesting an alternative.

Another nice example on the Kilimandege account is the Morning Glory. I'd taken to species level, but someone else thought this was a step too far. I'm not competent to disagree so took it down to Genus level (it would have helped if a note as to why they thought I'd gone too far would have been nice but I'm grateful for any feedback). So, if any of our budding naturalists want to put the plants back on the map, here is your chance to show humans do have the capacity to do good things.

About the Author

Until recently a member of KHS NCD, Peter Derry has been a regular contributor to The Shamba Times through articles on subjects ranging from Fabulous Flies...and their Marvellous Maggots, October 2023 to the Fibonacci Sequence, January 2021; his remarkable close-up photographs of plants such as Caesalpinia pulcherrima, July 2023 - and insects; and, back in 2015, his four-part series on Flower Photography. Now away from the Coast and Nairobi, he is turning his talents towards helping to conserve and maybe extend the country's biodiversity in other parts of Kenya in the way he describes above.

Units of Classification

Just to refresh our memories...this article refers to the identification of species, the basic unit of a classification system for grouping organisms as developed by Carl Linnaeus, a Swedish naturalist. Today, this system has evolved to include eight taxonomic levels: domain, kingdom, phylum, class, order, family, genus, and species. One of Linnaeus's most enduring contributions is binomial nomenclature, a standardised two-part naming system for all species, with the first part indicating the genus and the second the species, as exemplified by Hibiscus cannabinus above.

My Gardening Story

Introduction

To complement our long-running 'My Garden' series, we are now asking our Gardener Members to tell us their stories about the gardens in which they work. In this edition we hear from KHS NCD gardener members Charo Kombe and Baraka Kalenga.

MY GARDENING STORY by Charo Kombe Mwarandu

I live in Watamu on Garoda Plot 40 E where I have worked for Paul and Jane de Voest for 14 years. I started to develop the garden with the help of Jonathan Baya. I am still developing it every day since then.

There were many challenges affecting the trees and shrubs that I faced:

There were many insects eating the plants. I treated the plants with a solution made from Neem leaves (I soaked the Neem leaves for 24 hours. Then I kept the liquid and added a little chilli powder to it). After spraying the plants, many then started to produce flowers and to look shiny.

Some plants were affected by the lack of groundwater and started to wilt and did not flower so I learnt which plants needed lots of water and those that needed a little water.

In addition to these problems, some plants were affected by climatic conditions. I learnt from KHS NCD which plants need the sun and those that need to be in the shade. Now they are all doing better.

Large groups of monkeys which come through the garden and destroy plants and crops causing food insecurity for the gardeners. Also, if you are too close to monkeys, there is the risk of sickness from zoonotic diseases which can be transmitted easily from animals to humans.



By Charo Kombe Mwarandu

Some advantages of working here are...when I first came, I was not able to name the plants. But I tried my best and, with the help of the KHS NCD Shamba Times and the gardening courses, I now know the names of many plants. I have also learnt to prune so that the plants now produce many flowers and leaves that shine.

I have through Jonathan learnt about different types of landscaping. Here are some of those that I have started myself, as my photos show:

A Dieffenbachia area with some plants doing well in the sun and others doing so in the shade.

I made a rockery round the almond tree and added some extra plants.



I have been growing white and red Desert roses from seedlings and they are doing well. If you need Desert rose seedlings, they are available here at a good price.

I really love gardening and my work here and I am always ready to learn more every day. I will always make my garden shine and be very proud of *Jasra* garden .

My Gardening Life

Introduction

Our second KHS North Coast District gardener's story comes from Baraka Kalenga who works with Rolf Lattman at Ngamani, the replanted indigenous forest that was the subject of our September 2025 meeting, and that gives us all hope for the future.



My gardening story starts with my work as a Forester at Ngamani in Mtwapa. I have been there since 2011 up to today under the guidance of Rolf Lattmann. When he took over in 2006, the land was bare with only a few trees left. Rolf started planting the area with specific indigenous trees such as Mvule (*Milicia excelsa*), Mhuhu (*Brachylaena huillensis*), Mbambakofi (*Azelia quanzensis*), Sausage tree (*Kigelia africana*), Mfunu and many others. When I was first employed, I had limited knowledge but Rolf encouraged me to explore and learn more about forests. Over time, I have developed a keen interest in coastal forest trees like those I have mentioned and how to maintain them.



Now that the forest has grown, some of the trees need special attention. An example are the African Ebony trees (*Dalbergia melanoxylon*). They grow the way they like but not the way we want so I do some pruning to make sure we have two or three stems that will grow straight and big in diameter (as illustrated). I also do something called "policing". This is a way to give trees light. I cut the surrounding bushes since these are still short or smaller compared to the trees, which grew very fast. I also do mulching to keep moisture in the ground. I believe that this will help the trees to grow well.

By Baraka Kalenga

I joined KHS NCD in 2015 so as to learn more about gardening as well as to interact with other people and to gain more skills and knowledge. In our garden at Ngamani, we have fruit trees such as orange trees, tangerine, pawpaw, pomegranate, custard apple, mulberries, lemon and lime trees. We also have flowering plants such as hibiscus (as illustrated), bougainvillea, wandering Jew, orchids and many more.

I love pruning because it shapes the plant and encourages it to grow healthy. I find mulching and composting to be essential practices that bring life to soil. However, there is a big challenge during the dry season; many of the plants could die so watering is critical. We practise early watering in the morning to conserve moisture. The garden likes natural rainwater: it makes the trees, and other plants look shiny and more green than ever. On top



of everything else is pest damage. I have learned that using Neem extract is very effective to prevent this.

One of my successes is that I have established a kitchen garden so I am able to supply vegetables to the nearby households. I have also faced failures like losing young seedlings due to over-watering. Gardening has taught me patience and consistency.

My advice to my fellow gardeners is: **FEED YOUR SOIL AND WHATEVER YOU PLANT WILL GIVE YOU A GOOD RETURN.**

And keep on learning because every garden has its own lessons.

Plants and trees of the NCD.

A gallery of members' recent photographs



Adenium obesum
Kaiungu Gona, Msabaha



Evolvus sp.
Mariola Saliola, Malindi



Adenium obesum
Kaiungu Gona, Msabaha



Cyrtorchis neglecta orchid
Betty Wilson, Kilifi



Whitfieldia elongata
Nicola Morrell, Kilifi



Giriamia orchid
Ursula Brenneisen, Shanzu



Gonimbrasia zambesina
Nicola Morrell, Kilifi



Leaf-footed bug
Mimi Shaw, Malindi



Sunflower helianthus sp
Betty Bundotich, Kilifi



Mansoa alliacea
Crispin Sharp, Watamu



Craibia brevicaudata
Vicki Horsey, Vipingo Ridge



Bismarkia nobilis
Crispin Sharp, Watamu

What's up on Whatsapp ... continued

Msitu wa Ndoto

What about the plant life in this ancient forest? Panga ya Saidi lies in close proximity to Mawe Meru and Chasimba Caves, all of which have related and similar archaeology; collectively, they are known as Kilifi Caves. Apart from the sites being of cultural and spiritual significance to local communities, they are of great botanical importance, too. The scientific research that has been undertaken in the latter two sites has shown that Mawe Meru houses endemic plant communities, some of which have been mapped out by scientists, revealing the presence of unique types of plants that are only found in this rock outcrop in the world over.

The Chasimba outcrops have 93 species out of which 34 are endemic to them. The dominant trees, *Lannea welwitschii*, *Inhambanella henriquesii*, *Cola pseudoclavata*, *Gyrocarpus americanus* and *Pandanus rabaiensis*, are common only in this habitat. There are several species assigned by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) to the following statuses: Endangered (EN), Vulnerable (VU), Near Threatened (NT) and Critically Endangered (CR). These include *Kalanchoe ballyi* (EN), *Isolona cauliflora* (EN), *Chytranthus obliquinervis* (VU), *Cyathogyne usambarensis* (VU), *Zehneria sp.nov.*, *Euphorbia wakefieldii* (EN), *Combretum chionanthoides* (NT), and *Streptocarpus ionanthus* sub-species *rupicola* (CR), endemic to Chasimba, and *Oxystigma msoo* (VU). On the other hand, a new species, *Premna mwademei*, was recently recorded by scientists from the National Museums of Kenya (NMK).

The third site, the location of the *Msitu wa Ndoto* initiative, is also known to have a rich plant life although rigorous botanical research has only recently commenced. Notwithstanding, several plants on the IUCN Red List have already been identified here: *Cola octoloboides* (EN); *Cola porphyrantha* (CR), *Cola pseudoclavata* (EN), *Hibiscus holstii* (VU), *Cynometra webberi* (NT), *Euphorbia wakefieldii* (EN), *Streptocarpus ionanthus* ssp. *rupicola* (NT), *Uvariadendron kirkii* (VU), *Asteranthe asterias* (NT), and *Mkilua fragrans* (NT). Interestingly, there is a new species of *Dorstenia* that is being described, which has also been found at Panga ya Saidi.

Although this site is being opened up through the creation of the Forest of Dreams, it is believed that the project provides the conditions for a responsible approach to the conservation and sustainability of the plant life to be achieved. Collaboration with NMK in this regard would also be of mutual benefit.

Sources:

The Story - Mara Menzies in conversation with Wendy Taylor; <https://www.msituwandoto.com>

The Plant Life - Kilifi Caves (Panga Ya Saidi, Mawe Meru and Chasimba Caves), National Museums of Kenya UNESCO submission dated 30/06/2023; <https://www.inaturalist.org/observations> accessed on 10th September 2025.

Reports on our recent meetings



On **Thursday 17th July** more than 50 members gathered in the KHS NCD' Chairman's garden at Kibokoni Residence in Malindi to hear a talk about garden design from Kenyan-born water expert, farmer, and garden designer, Anne-Marie Steyn.

The meeting began with tea and coffee, as always, and there was a very well-stocked pop-up shop available under the doum palms in Crispin's garden . The NCD pop-up shop sells a very wide and useful range of gardening and home decorative items with stock sourced from all over Kenya and overseas too.

Anne-Marie Steyn's talk covered all the basic aesthetic and practical rules that might apply to the design of a garden including the geometry and psychology of how we humans respond to certain spaces, to tree cover or open land, to height, to boundary walls and to buildings within a garden. There was lots of science in the talk, but lots of art and aesthetics too, including some very interesting observations/rules about how colours work together to create mood and harmony within a garden.

Anne-Marie's absorbing talk was followed by a Q and A session before members finally made their way home to review and reflect upon their own gardens following all we had learned that morning. A fascinating talk, a very well attended meeting, and following earlier rain, fortunately a sunny morning.



On **August 25th** around 40 NCD members met at Bilgewater in Watamu to see how the garden created and planted by our late Chairman, John Golds, had developed and changed since the property changed hands following John's death a few years ago.

Our meeting began, as usual, with a tea and coffee service by Holly, and there was a good range of essential gardening tools, equipment and garden feeds in the NCD pop-up shop run at each meeting by Maike.

John's Head Gardener, Katana Baya, is still at work in the Bilgewater garden and it was Katana who spoke to members about how the garden was changing and what was still 'in', and what was now 'out'. Katana led a walk around the garden and down to the shoreline.

John's beloved bromeliads still make a splash in the garden near the house as does the remarkable silvery palm *Bismarkia nobilis* widely admired and photographed by our members as it is a truly magnificent specimen of a wonderfully attractive and unusual palm.



Diary of upcoming NCD events



Saturday 25 October at 1000.

We visit a beachfront garden on the Marine Park in Malindi.

A rare chance for members to visit a garden on the exclusive Marine Park beach in Malindi and to learn of the challenges of beachfront gardening.



November 2025 at 1000. A Botanical Event, Kilifi.

We invite members to return to Pwani University for a botanical event centred around the botanical research activities of Pwani students and faculty, and offering a chance to KHS members to view the KHS Centenary indigenous tree planting that took place 3 years ago. How are our 100 young trees doing?

More details of this event will follow later.



Thursday 25 December at 1000. Watamu.

We invite members to join the popular and ever happy KHS North Coast District Christmas day cruise on Mida Creek, Watamu. This traditional event is a Christmas day delight with a traditional Christmas lunch served along with lots of refreshments. More details of how to book your berth will follow later.

KHS North Coast District



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The KHS North Coast District quarterly newsletter, The Shamba Times, is edited by Wendy Taylor and Carissa Nightingale, with layouts by Crispin Sharp.