

Volume 7 issue 4

October 2020



Kenya Horticultural Society North Coast District

The Shamba Times



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North Coast District News



Chairman's Notes

Welcome to the October 2020 edition of the Shamba Times, which of course comes to you in the midst of strange times. But finally there are some green shoots emerging. The NCD committee has met, we have decided to push back the 2020 AGM and Raffle to March 2021, and to postpone our Gardeners' Courses, but, happily, monthly garden visits and events for our members resumed in September.

But, in the context of shielding, social distancing, and adhering to government guidelines for the protection of all, it is important that the North Coast District continues to do what it can to stay in touch with its members, and to provide a forum for the exchange of gardening ideas, information, tips, advice and even warnings. To this end we have established the NCD WhatsApp group, which seems to be popular with many of our members, and which provides a day to day source of conversation about trees, plants and gardening on the coast. And we continue to produce our regular quarterly editions of the Shamba Times. I hope that you will enjoy this edition, in which we feature trees. I find it very easy to take trees for granted in this green and fertile land, but trees, particularly indigenous trees, need our attention and our support.



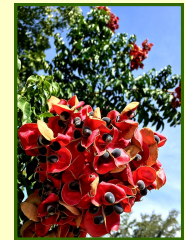
And on the subject of trees, we suggested to our members that they might wish to plant a new tree in their own gardens in memory of John Golds. I know some members have already planted in John's memory and I hope that in the next edition of the Shamba Times we shall be able to feature some of 'John's trees', and to reflect on how a tree can bring us solace, comfort, and hope.

Thank you to you all for staying in touch, for continuing to support the KHS NCD, and for adapting to our new normal. You *are* the NCD, and we greatly value your support.

Crispin Sharp.

Majidea zangueberica

Our cover picture on this edition is of part of the magnificent *Majidea zangueberica*, an indigenous tree, often referred to as The Black Pearl Tree, the Mgambo, or the velvet seed tree.



Majidea zangueberica is a small tree of the family Sapindaceae. The tree is native to Eastern Africa and grows up to 5 metres (16 feet) tall. Perhaps you have one in your garden? Or might like to plant one - why not?



KENYA HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY
Gardening Kenya

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. Of course we welcome new members, so why not see if you can introduce a new member to us? this quarter?

Officers of The North Coast District

Chairman	Mr Crispin Sharp sharpcrispin@hotmail.com
Vice Chairman	This post remains open
Hon Sec	Mrs Wendy Taylor wendy.elizabethkenya@gmail.com
Hon Treasurer	Mr Rupert Partridge rdpartridge@gmail.com
NCD Shop	Mrs Elfried Hoogeweegen hoogeweegen@africaonline.co.ke

What's up on WhatsApp?



Many of you are active members of our North Coast District WhatsApp group, and others are regular visitors to the group, and take pleasure from the varied posts, pictures and conversations that take place there everyday. So we thought it would be a good idea to pick a piece that has appeared on WhatsApp and reproduce it here in the Shamba Times, thus ensuring that **all** our members get to see the best of what is happening online. Some of you may remember the interest sparked when Sandra Riches posted photos of her raised bed vegetable garden, which we recreate below. To join the NCD WhatsApp group, please contact our Secretary, Wendy Taylor.

My Raised Bed Vegetable Garden by Sandra Riches

Like you all, I love gardening and find it extremely therapeutic and rewarding. However, I am not a gardener and would not presume to tell any of you what to do! But I have been asked to share with you how I made my little vegetable garden.

I decided to make a raised garden primarily to prevent dudus and dogs accessing it. Also, my garden is mostly on coral so it was more sensible to build a frame and fill it. A mainly sunny area was chosen and the ground cleared of all weeds and other debris. The frame was made of planks, all treated with the dreaded gladiator first and then the poles were embedded in concrete, another prevention against insects. We put a layer of stones as a base, then a layer of coconut husks and then topped it up with a mixture of soil and compost, mainly compost. Shade netting was then used as a cover.



In the middle of May, I sowed all my seeds and soon got results except for the herbs: none of the grew which was very disappointing. When the seedlings were really established, I started spraying with a liquid made from neem leaves, ginger and garlic to ward off insects. After soaking these ingredients together in a bucket of hot water for about five days, the liquid was then strained off and ready to use. It generally worked except on lettuces, on which I used Pyrethrum dudu spray



In a short while, I was able to harvest my vegetable garden produce: rocket, cucumbers, lettuce, mint and spinach. And more recently, green peppers, tomatoes, okra, parsley - and chillies coming. It has indeed been very satisfying to have fresh salad and vegetables daily from my own little shamba. The raised bed has proved excellent for this purpose so I am extremely grateful to Mwalimu Katsuwi, my gardener and partner in crime. After all, he did all the hard, laborious work in establishing it!

A postscript:

As of August, I am in the process of building another small raised bed to provide space for okra and pepper plants.

Indigenous Trees of Kenya

Mpingo



Dalbergia melanoxylon, commonly known as African blackwood or Mpingo in Kiswahili, is an indigenous small, spiny tree or shrub found in the dry regions of Africa in growing zones where the altitude is between 0-1,400 metres above sea level, with annual rains of between 800-1,400 mm. In Kenya, it is found in Meru National Park and within the counties of Kitui, Machakos, Taita Taveta and Kilifi. It is from the many mpingo trees that used to grow in the area that Vipingo Ridge got its name. It is not a particularly good-looking tree - nor photogenic, being rather small and straggly although it can be pruned into shape. However, it comes into its own when it flowers; indeed, it flowers in profusion with small, white, sweet-scented blossoms in short, branched sprays, much loved by the bees and butterflies. After flowering come the pods, small, thin and flat containing one or two seeds, which need to be collected quickly if the latter are to be used for propagation, as they are soon attacked by insects.



What really marks out this tree, however, is its dense, lustrous wood, currently described as the world's most expensive wood. Ranging in colour from reddish to pure black (hence its also being known in the past as African ebony though the name 'ebony' is now reserved for a limited number of timbers yielded by the genus *Diospyros*), its fine texture though hard and durable, dimensional stability, termite and moisture resistance, have led to its demand in Europe for the production of fine musical instruments such as clarinets, oboes, flutes, recorders and pipes. Various German knife companies continue to sell knives with blackwood handles due to the wood's moisture repellent qualities.

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Closer to home, the mpingo has long been prized for its timber by wood carvers in Tanzania, Mozambique and Kenya for the *Makonde* carvings. Strictly, the latter are the art form of the Makonde people living in the first two countries but the wood-carving industry in Kenya also has its roots in their tradition. It is the Kamba who, when enlisted by the British during World War I to serve in Tanganyika, then occupied by Germany, were introduced to this art form. A returning soldier, Mutisya Munge, impressed by the woodcarvings he had seen in Tanganyika, copied the style and passed on his knowledge to neighbours and family members. He is known for his *Binadamu* askari carvings.

Mpingo - by Wendy Taylor

The Kamba quickly became skilled wood carvers and, from the early 1920s, the carving industry in Kenya grew and flourished. Their numbers quickly expanded as they took advantage of the increased trade that began in the 1950s. By the late 1990s the Kenya woodcarvers had built the largest export trade of this kind in Africa, generating around US \$20 million yearly. *Dalbergia melanoxylon* is the wood that mainly supported the industry. By the 1980s, however, most of the larger trees in harvesting areas had been exterminated, leaving the industry to be supported by other species. Indeed, it is commercially extinct, meaning it is no longer available in viable quantities. The wood used in the carving industry is mostly smuggled in from Tanzania and Mozambique, raising concerns about the tree's survival in these two countries as well.



The high demand for, and overuse, of the Mpingo timber here and globally has left the tree facing extinction. Coupled with slow growth rates - the tree takes upwards of 60 years to mature, it now appears on the red list of endangered species of the World Conservation Monitoring Centre, a UNEP conservation project. There is some evidence of small-scale conservation schemes in East Africa.



Notwithstanding the time it takes for the mpingo to mature, how easy is it to propagate mpingo? Propagation is mainly from seed. One source states there are good germination rates: 50-60% in 8-20 days. Another, the Kenya Forestry Research Institute, on the other hand, says that the germination rate is low - so perhaps hampering conservation efforts? But let's give the last word to a KHS NCD member who, seeing the threat to the tree, has started his own tree conservation scheme.

***Recollections and Regeneration* by Chris Wilson**

In my youth in far off days, I recollect looking at endless rows of exquisite carvings lining Digo Road, Mombasa and in Diani made out of an incredible dense, near to black wood, with a white softwood outer. It took a polish with Kiwi Black to really bring out the character and this was skillfully done by the Akamba carvers.



Indigenous Trees - Mpingo contd.

It was only later that it gradually entered my head that the supply of this incredible wood was dwindling fast as the size of the carvings dwindled too. So, I set about finding out more about the source of the tree and my search ranged all over Eastern Africa. To my surprise, I found that it was a Kilifi native and that Vipingo, the place of the mpingo, actually meant something. It was ideally suited to our climate and soils and was very hardy.

So, many years on, we decided to set about planting copses of these trees mainly around our house sites and specific allocated areas which would not be developed any time soon. We planted from seeds; there was a low germination but frankly the seed numbers per tree were so numerous that it did not seem to matter. Once germinated they were very sturdy; we kept them in bags until they were large enough to transplant and when the rains were with us and as early into the rains as possible. Spacing was about 5 metres by 5 metres.



The oldest copses are now more than ten years old and they have grown well if slowly and are seeding copiously. Small, scruffy and unimpressive but they are the African Blackwood, Mpingo, and we hope that they will grow back to give us that magnificent wood in a sustainable way.



Not quite the last word: information has been tracked down from Rolf Lattman about his mpingo propagation at Ngamani, Mtwapa. When he took over the 28 acres of land in 2006, only five large-ish mpingo and 10 smaller ones together with about 15 other trees had survived the local maize farming practices, which caused soil erosion on the sloping ground that characterised much of the area. Nevertheless, he found that a number of mpingo grew again from roots which remained in the ground. Any new root suckers growing too close to one another were transplanted to suitable areas. It is through propagation using suckers that Rolf now has an estimated 150 mpingo trees, some with a circumference at chest height of 80 cm and a height of 8 to 9 metres.

Main Sources:

Tree with the most expensive wood globally by Tim Wanyonyi, Storylines Kenya, July 2020.

Makonde Art, African Blackwood Conservation Project, undated.

Dalbergia melanoxylon, Useful Trees & Shrubs for Kenya, The World Agroforestry Centre, 2005.

Trees. A poem by Joyce Kilmer



Trees

**I think that I shall never see
A poem lovely as a tree.**

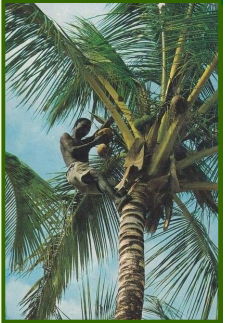
**A tree whose hungry mouth is prest
Against the earth's sweet flowing breast;**

**A tree that looks at God all day,
And lifts her leafy arms to pray;**

**A tree that may in Summer wear
A nest of robins in her hair;**

**Upon whose bosom snow has lain;
Who intimately lives with rain.**

**Poems are made by fools like me,
But only God can make a tree.**

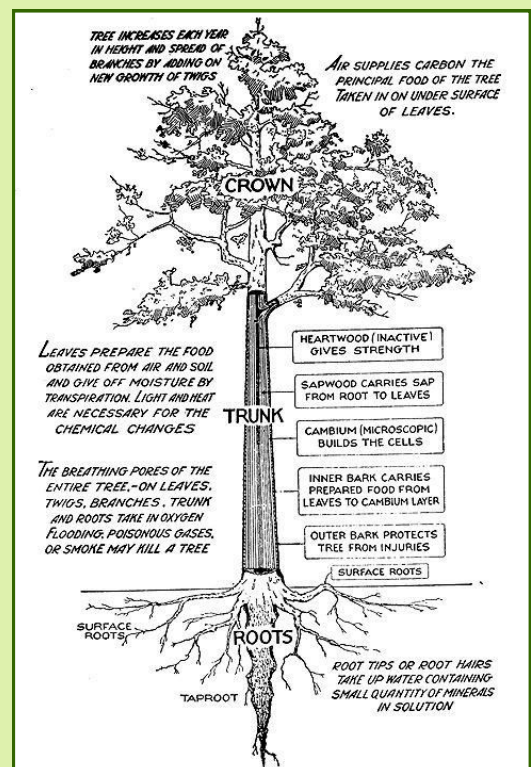
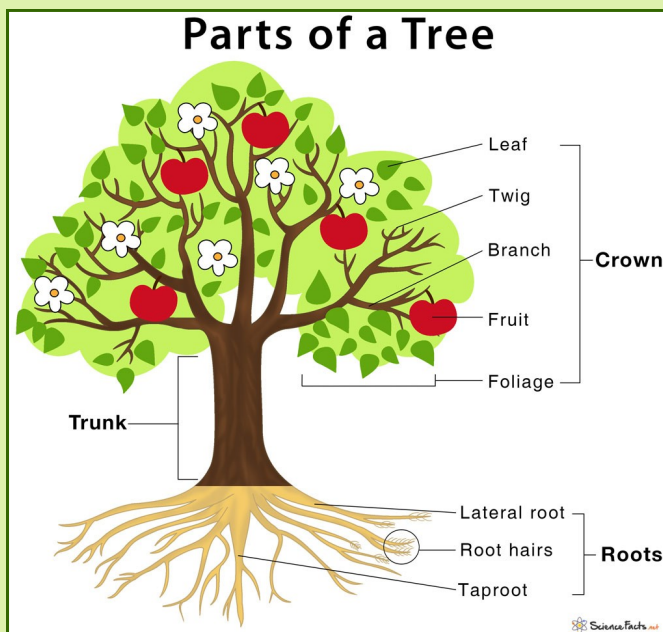




Towards a Shamba Times glossary of botanical terms Part 5 - Trees.

An Explanatory Note

In the fifth part of our glossary in-the-making, we focus on trees. First, a distinction between trees and shrubs. Many reference books on trees have in their title “& Shrubs” and you will find in the section classifying shrubs that a particular shrub is described as: “or a small tree” or perhaps “a shrubby tree”. Though sometimes the classification may seem arbitrary, there are some very clear differences, apart from height, as the following indicates: a shrub is a woody, low-lying perennial plant that produces main shoots or stems coming from the base rather than one trunk. The contrast is well illustrated by the following diagrams.



Trees have various traits such as:

many different **shapes** as characterised by diverse types of **crowns** or **canopies**: umbrella; round; semi-circular; narrow; wide-spreading; irregular.

different types of **trunks**: straight; single-trunked, high branching; multi-stemmed; single-trunked, low-branching; crooked trunk; fluted trunk; and buttressed.

different types of **barks**: smooth; lenticellate; striated; fissured; with conical knobs; peeling; flaking; scaly. The texture of a tree's bark can also change over its lifetime.

two sorts of **roots**: long anchor roots (which may be tap roots) that penetrate deep, often to the water table, and hold the tree in the ground, and shorter, feeder roots that spread out in the top 1.5 m of soil and are generally more active in providing the tree with water. At full maturity, a tree's roots take up an area roughly equal to the canopy size.

Continued ...



Similarly, turning to the **leaves** of trees, there are many different distinctions...here are some:

there are two basic **leaf types**: simple and compound. A compound leaf is distinguished by having a blade which is divided into smaller leaflets: pinnate or pinnately compound; twice compound or bi-pinnately-compound; trifoliolate and multifoliolate or digitate, such as the leaf of the Baobab, *Adansonia digitate*, and of the Kapok tree, *Ceiba pentandra*.

there are different kinds of **leaf arrangements** - opposite, alternate, or whorled.

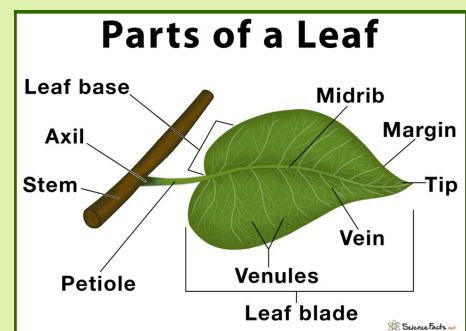
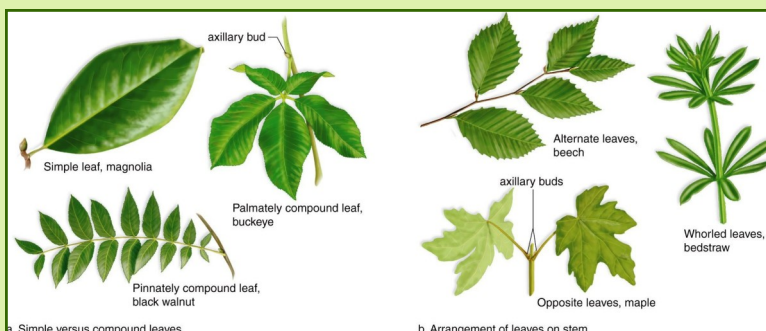
there are different kinds of **leaf margins or edges** - entire, wavy, lobed, and toothed or serrated.

there are several different types of **leaf shapes** including narrow elliptic, broad elliptic, linear, triangular, heart-shaped and rounded.

a **leaf tip** or **apex** may be rounded, notched, pointed or blunt.

then there are differences in **venation** and in **leaf bases**, while leaves can have hairs or be hairless.

The illustrations below capture some of these distinctions as does the photograph of a branch of the *Kigelia africana* with its accompanying leaf description.



Description of the Leaves of *Kigelia africana* (Sausage tree):

compound; wavy; occur in threes; crowded at the ends of branches;

3-5 pairs plus a terminal leaflet, each broadly elliptic; up to 100 mm.

in length;

apex round or tapering, often with a sharp tip.

Ziziphus robertsoniana

by Ann Robertson.

I have been asked to explain how this tree was named after me!

In 1986, I spent my time between Nairobi and the coast, helping Ian with his work on cassava and studying the sacred Kaya Forests for the District Environmental Assessment Reports. I was also helping Rene Haller with his consultancy at Robinson Club Baobab hotel at Diani. Rene was encouraging the hotel to preserve the remnant indigenous forest on the land on both sides of the Diani access road. He asked me to name the trees and shrubs in the area around the hotel buildings to create awareness of the value of this vegetation, both to the guests and the hotel staff. Rene then prepared attractive labels for the trees.

I usually stayed for a day or two at the hotel and parked my car in the staff car park under a small, shady, evergreen tree. Having collected specimens as necessary, and named most of the trees and shrubs, many of which were exotic introductions to brighten up the gardens, I realised that I did not know what this nice little shady tree was called.



Over the next few months I made a series of collections of the leaves and then the flowers and then the fruits. I tried to identify the specimens at the East African Herbarium at the Nairobi Museum, but could only suppose it was an exotic introduction, perhaps in the genus *Ziziphus* in the Rhamnaceae family.

Duplicates of my collections were sent to the Herbarium at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, UK and to the Herbarium at the Missouri Botanical Gardens in St Louis, USA, and the botanists there were also puzzled as they had no matching material.

Eventually Dr Henk Beentje at Kew decided, in consultation with other plant taxonomists that this was a hitherto unnamed species, and probably indigenous to the East African coastal forests. He very kindly named the species *Ziziphus robertsoniana*, in my honour, and the description was published in the Kew Bulletin (Vol. 51, No. 1, 1996, pp. 197-199) citing my collection no. 4438 of 21st January 1987 as the Type. It turned out that a sterile specimen that I had collected in Kaya Kinondo, the nearby sacred Digo Kaya, a few months before, was the same species, but it had not been possible to name it and it had not drawn anyone's attention. Later, during the Coast Forest Survey, Quentin Luke and I found many large trees on Dzombo Mountain in southern Kwale District, a few kilometres inland, so it was indeed an indigenous species.

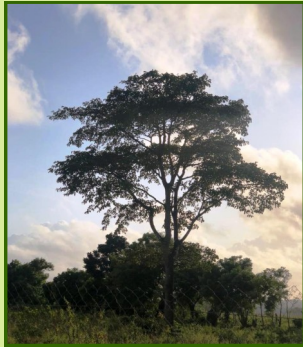
I had been planting as many indigenous trees and shrubs as possible in our Malindi garden, and *Z. robertsoniana* proved easy to grow from seed. The one I planted on 1st August 1988 is now enormous and it is a great privilege to live with a tree named after one. I have distributed a large number of seeds and seedlings to friends and colleagues at the coast, often through KHS North Coast District. There are even quite healthy specimens in gardens up-country. The photograph, kindly taken by Dr Dino Martins, is of the tree in Hilda Tucker's garden, and I thank Hilda for her permission to take the photo and for sharing her passion for indigenous plants with me.

The tree is evergreen, with small greenish flowers, and fingertip sized green fruit with one or two flattish orange coloured seeds in a thin sweet fleshy layer. The birds and bats love the fruit, so seeds are distributed widely. It is a puzzle as to why this tree is rare in the wild. The most attractive feature is the deeply three veined leaf which starts bright lime green as the new foliage emerges following the rains, and then matures to a dark glossy green with age.

Ziziphus robertsoniana is listed on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, so if you want to save a species, I can supply you with seed, or a seedling!

Trees of the North Coast District

A gallery of members' photographs



Milicia excelsa - Mvule.
Vicky Horsey, Vipingo Ridge.



Mango and Coconut Palms.
Nicola Morrell, Takaungu Creek Kilifi.



Adansonia digitata - Boobab
Carol Korschen, Manda Island.



Pseudobersama mossambicensis
Norbert Rottcher, Malindi.



Manilkara mochisia
Norbert Rottcher. Kilifi.



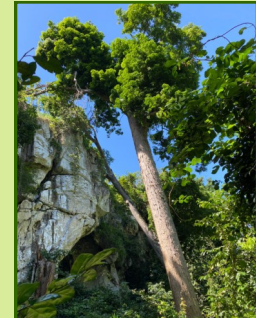
Gardenia volkensii
Santie de Villiers. Kilifi



Hyphaene thabacia - Doum palm
Crispin Sharp. Malindi.



Adansonia digitata - Baobab
Checkie Woods. Mida Creek.



Prioria (Oxystigma) msou
Norbert Rottcher. Kilifi



Azelia quanzensis - Mbambakofi
Gail Outram. Kilifi.



Sterculia appendiculata
Norbert Rottcher. Kilifi.



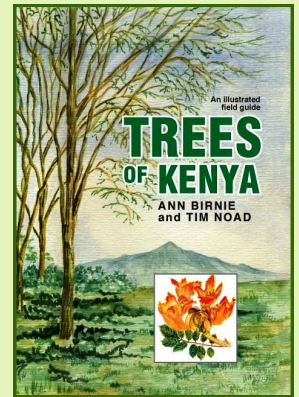
Manilkara mochisia
Gail Outram. Kilifi.

Odds and Ends

ILLUSTRATING A POINT by Wendy Taylor

In the *Towards a Shamba Times glossary of botanical terms* in the April issue of the Shamba Times, we have reproduced illustrations by Ann Birnie taken from *Useful trees and shrubs for Kenya*, Patrick Maundu & Bo Tengnäs, World Agroforestry Centre, 2005. Ann's approval to do this was sought and gained. To reciprocate, we have sent her copies of the Shamba Times issues concerned.

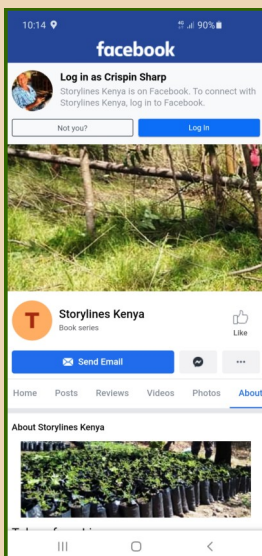
Having done this, my appetite was whetted and I wanted to find out more about Ann Birnie, the illustrator...and indeed, the writer. I found that her major publication is *Trees of Kenya* co-authored with the late Tim Noad, which was first published in 1989 and revised in 2011: it details over 300 indigenous and exotic trees found in Kenya. Another of her publications, which was for the younger reader, was *What Tree is That? A beginners' guide to 40 trees in Kenya*, 1997, with many of the illustrations being hers.



Then, much closer to home - to KHS, it is Ann who designed the society's glorious logo, *Gloriosa*, which always features on the front and other pages of our own district journal. She and her husband have been long-term members of KHS first in Nairobi and now of the Mount Kenya branch, with Jim having audited the accounts of the Society for a number of years.

TREE STORIES by Wendy Taylor

If you are a fan of the Saturday Nation's Seeds of Gold, you may have read amongst the many interesting items a series of excellent articles on trees. African olive, Markhamia, Tamarind, Sandalwood, Mahogany and Mpingo (the subject of our main feature) are some of the trees recently written about. Their author is Tim Wanyonyi, Managing Partner of a start-up organisation called Storylines Kenya. This is a communication consultancy based in Nairobi which carries out research and writes reports thereon for its clients, one such client being the Nation Media Group for which it produces the content on agro-forestry - and hence the current series of 'tree stories'.



Delving deeper, it is interesting to note the objectives of the stories: "i) to create awareness on trees, especially indigenous ones that are endangered; ii) to share information on their benefits that include commercial products like timber and environmental protection; and, iii) to share information on their propagation, planting and management to promote their domestication to reduce exploitation pressure on natural populations."

All good stuff and definitely worth a read. Here is the link: www.facebook.com/storylineskenya/



NCD Committee Meeting held on Tuesday 8 September 2020.

The following was discussed and agreed at our recent committee meeting:

Our 2020 AGM and Raffle draw will be postponed until March 2021. All raffle tickets already sold will remain valid for the 2021 draw, and we will seek to offer the same range of exciting prizes.

The NCD will resume garden visits, talks and events from September 2020, open to all members from any part of the district, as follows:

- **22 September at 1000.** A visit to The Hanging Gardens in Malindi to learn about orchids and bees.
- **27 October at 1000.** A visit to a new shamba of indigenous trees at Mida Creek in Watamu.
- **24 November at 1000.** A visit to Marion, Lady Langham's newly created garden in Kilifi.
- **25 December.** Christmas Lunch on the Turtle Bay Beach Club dhow, cruising Mida Creek.

25th December 2020—the annual NCD Christmas Day Cruise.

This is a delightfully informal and relaxing way to spend Christmas Day, cruising up Mida Creek and back, to anchor for an excellent lunch of fish, lobster, prawns and traditional Christmas turkey on board the newly refurbished Turtle Bay Beach Club hotel dhow.

The price of 3,500/- per person includes all drinks. KWS marine park fees are the only extra and are, at present, Kenyan citizens and Residents 100/- and Visitors USD15. We meet at Turtle Bay Beach Club hotel at 10.30 and are transported by minibus to Mida Creek. The minibuses return us to the hotel at about 15.30.



This KHS NCD event is open to all members and their guests but since it is very popular, booking is on a first come first served basis. Payment is not required until mid-December. If you would like to spend Christmas Day in this congenial way, please contact **Holly Pritchett** on **0722244256** or at **hahmalindi@gmail.com**, giving your name and immigration status (Kenyan, Resident, Visitor) and the same details for any guests you wish to bring. Holly will be very happy to assist you to make your reservation.

Welcome aboard.

