

July
2024
Vol 11 Issue 3

The Shamba Times

Kenya Horticultural Society North Coast District



North Coast District

IN THIS EDITION

The KHS NCD AGM 2024.

My garden by Mariola Salioli

A Community Garden project in London.

North Coast District Report of recent events and meetings

Odds and Ends - a gardener is honoured.

A Diary of Forthcoming Events.

2024 Subscriptions Notice

Our cover photo

Our cover photo this month is of a Heliconia, scientific name being *Heliconia psittacorum*.

Of course Heliconias are not indigenous to Kenya but are widely used in domestic tropical gardens as ornamentals. They are hardy, they enjoy sun and shade, but they do need to be kept fairly moist if they are to show at their best.



Once the flowers have died back it may be best to cut the plant back to just above the level of the soil and wait for it to come back stronger than ever - they rarely fail to do so.

Chairman's Notes

Hello everybody, and welcome to the July edition of The Shamba Times. There are many of our regular features in this edition, including a My Garden piece from a Malindi garden, and a story about a community garden renovation from one of our members in London.

Kenya Horticultural Society may have been formed 100 years ago in Nairobi with its founder members seeing it as a vehicle for the promotion of gardening and small scale horticulture, but today KHS is a national society that includes within its mission the education of youngsters about horticulture, as well as the protection and promotion of Kenya's natural environment.

So, when an opportunity arose for KHS North Coast District to do some good, we took it. In June our district donated KSh100,000 to a fund for the eradication of house crows within our district and beyond. House crows, which are an invasive species to Kenya, have severely impacted the safe environment of indigenous birds and small mammals, and are now classified as pests. A ROCHA, an NGO, has taken the lead in a new initiative to bring the population of crows under strict control with the aim of vastly reducing their numbers and thereby removing the threat they pose to the natural environment.

We will keep you posted as to how the Crows No More project goes. Its aim is to effectively eliminate crows from the Kenya coast by 31 December 2024. It's a tall order and one which will need our support and that of KWS and other governmental agencies.. Here is wishing the project leader, Colin Jackson, and his team every success. Fingers crossed.

Crispin Sharp.

The Crows No More project

As referenced in the Chairman's notes (page 2), KHS North Coast District has donated KSh100,000 to the Crows No More project launched by A ROCHA and which aims to drastically reduce the house crow numbers within Lamu, Malindi, Watamu and Kilifi i.e. our district.

NCD will be updating members on the progress made by A ROCHA, and our understanding is that if for any reason the project cannot go ahead, A ROCHA will refund our donation back to NCD funds.



CROWS NO MORE !!

A ROCHA KENYA

Please support us

 M-Changa - scan here
www.mchanga.africa/fundraise/r/41236



 Pay bill - **891300**
Account- **CROWSNOMORE**

Find out more about our project to eliminate House Crows along the Kenyan coast on <https://www.arocha.or.ke/>.

Email : crowsnomore@arocha.org

 07 18 422 487  Plot 28, Watamu Rd
Watamu .


Scan Me

Of course A ROCHA would welcome private donations from whatever source and all the details you need to make a donation are on the flyer below. There is also direction as to where interested parties can obtain more information about the project.

My Garden in Malindi

It was not difficult to get Mariola to talk about her lovely garden in Malindi whether through her leading us on a guided tour or by answering our many questions about it...

Tell us about the origins of the garden

The original garden was purchased in 1990 as a newly sub-divided plot. It had little vegetation on it apart from a *Sterculia africana*, a Flamboyant (*Delonix regia*) and two Neems (*Azadirachta indica*). Later, I had the good fortune to be able to purchase the adjoining plot and so, with the amalgamation of the two, I now have a garden of the size and scale that suits me.

Did you have a grand plan as to how your garden should be laid out?

My garden really evolved by “feel.” As an architect, I was guided by how best to use the space but also by what “impression” the garden would give with some surprise factors being built in. I knew I wanted flowering plants, I knew I wanted colour and, as I became more familiar with local plants, I knew I wanted some perfumed ones. And so, the process of planting up proceeded...

In June, 2009, however, nearly all the plants were destroyed as a fire raged through the *makuti* roofs of the accommodation burning everything in its wake except for the *Sterculia* and a palm tree - if you look closely, you will see some of the branches still retain the cindered areas created by the scorching heat. Much of the soil in the garden had to be replaced as it had become hard and inert. The garden had to be recreated to become eventually to what you see now!



By Mariola Salioli

Indeed, there are so many plants to see...

Amongst those in bloom now, are the *Hibiscus* - I have almost all the different colours of the plant including a double, pale orange one and a double, yellow one, as illustrated. Similarly, I have many different coloured *Ixora* - including red, orange and yellow. Another yellow flowering shrub is *Cordia lutea*, as illustrated. The easy growing *Gardenia volkensii* tree also has yellow flowers when in full bloom although initially they are white.



Another tree with yellow flowers is the seasonal flowering *Cassia fistula*, as shown. Indeed, it is the seasonal flowerings which give a sense of the seasons experienced in Europe. When the Flamboyant comes into bloom, as it is now, I refer to this as my red season. Earlier, I had several white blossomed and, as it happens, perfumed flowering shrubs in season including *Feretia apodanthera* and *Jasminum floribundum*.



I refer to my *Sterculia* as my orchid tree. Not only do the branches host my many orchids (two are shown here), most of which I have sourced from Nick Conway, but, under its canopy, the micro-climate seems conducive to their growth. A variety of birds like it here, too. As you can see, I have quite a few potted plants. I have tended to add to the garden by planting plants in pots rather than creating flower beds. This does not apply, however, to my citrus trees, which are a recent and productive addition to the garden since they have produced fruit within a relatively short period after being planted out. My little vegetable garden is also quite productive providing a regular supply of *mchicha*, spinach and basil and bananas.



... in conversation with Wendy Taylor.

Apart from several clumps of palm trees, I have three young-ish *Baobab* (*Adansonia digitata*), always pleasing to look at and observe.

Clearly, the plants, the grass, etc. are thriving so what is your approach to care and maintenance?



First, I am very fortunate in having access to plenty of good, sweet water so I am able to water twice a day using my three bore holes. Secondly, I have three experienced gardeners who carefully tend the garden pruning regularly, cutting back dead vegetation, and so forth. All garden waste is then disposed of in one of the three compost chambers, used subsequently to feed the plants. Thirdly, I regularly refer to Marion Langham's *Tropical Flowering Plants* book which I find such a helpful source of information and guidance not just on the names of plants but on the characteristics of individual plants such as drought resistance, sun tolerance, soil and feeding requirements, and so forth. Finally, my garden is both my passion and my source of calmness so I hope that I give to it what I take from it.

Plants, trees, and climate of the NCD.

A gallery of members' recent photographs



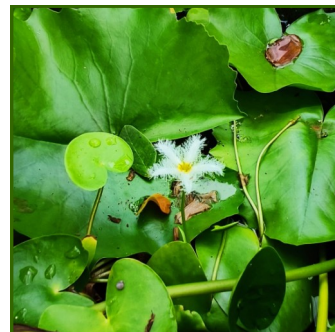
Murraya paniculata

Gail Outram, Kilifi .



Stenocereus thurberi

Katana Baya, Watamu



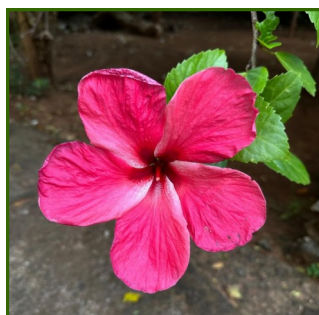
Nymphoides indica

Wigi, Watamu



Calliandra surinamensis

Pauline Balletto, Malindi



Hibiscus

Robert Horner, Kilifi



Rhodocactus grandifolius

Wigi, Watamu



Adenium obesum

Katana Baya



Canna americanallis

Crispin Sharp, Malindi



Combretum constrictum

Carissa Nightingale, Vipingo Beach



Delonix regia

Mariola Salioli, Malindi



Heliconia psittacorum

Crispin Sharp, Malindi

Members are greatly encouraged to post pictures of plants and flowers in their gardens which we can then reproduce in The Shamba Times for the delight of all members.

Thank you.

The restoration of a neglected inner city garden

The kind of personal isolation that only crowds can elicit, is typical of large cities like London. Everyone rushes with intent but with no social contact. Neighbours may be greeted but not engaged. We have lived in our Central London 1830s Victorian terrace house for over 30 years and befriended few.

At the end of our road there is a 1 acre 'garden' which had become a neglected space used only by dog owners. The space was avoided by other residents as it was known as a 'dog toilet'; other squares banned dogs so this space was intensively used with consequent heavy fouling.

4 years ago our local Councilor invited residents to befriend Thornhill Road Gardens asking for volunteers. The start was slow as users were sceptical improvements could be made and indeed some were antagonistic saying 'this is our park; a dog park' and 'we dont want it turned into a garden'. Indeed the pandemic had greatly increased the number of dog owners who idolized their pets and were a powerful lobby group not to be confronted.

Thornhill Road Gardens is a rectangle (East to West), surrounded by railings, tall London Plane trees and shrub borders, with a central paved area separating an Eastern 'lawn' from a Western 'lawn'. Both lawns were degraded to bald earth, mud in Winter with little grass. The 3-4 beds in each area were of rock hard London clay with little bedding.; a mattock was needed to break up the soil.



By Dirk Meerstadt (an NCD Malindi member)

The first task was to fence off the Eastern ¼ acre, against opposition, to create a dog free area... not easy as By-laws forbid fencing off public spaces but this was permissible as long as the fencing was temporary, even long term temporary! We were warned that in the past such fencing had been pulled down by dog owners. Over the past 4 years this area has been deep fork aerated, top dressed with over 6 tons of sharp sand and repeatedly reseeded followed by both



autumn fertiliser (high in phosphate/potassium and low nitrogen) to promote root growth and Spring fertilizer (high in Nitrogen and low in Phosphate/Potassium) to promote a heathy sward. The 4 beds have been deep dug and each had over 2 tons of horse manure (from thoroughbred Newmarket horses!) applied with flowers and shrubs planted. A safe space for families with children was created and gradually used more and more.

Once this lawn was revived we not only recruited a healthy set of new volunteers (now over 100 on the WA Goup) but also the support of the previously sceptical dog owners who told families with children to use the fenced off lawn area for picnics etc... 'the dogs don't know if the laid out food is for them!'

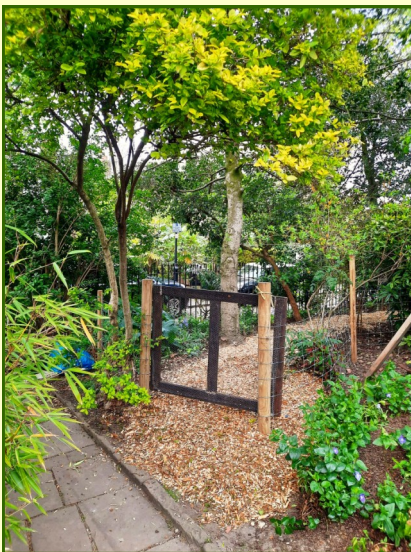
With the new found volunteers:

1. The huge leaf fall from the large London Plane trees is no longer taken away; a large composting area has been created and this is recycled to improve the Gardens soil quality.
2. From the gardeners' hut with its little kitchen and toilet a 200yd plastic water ring main with 6 stand pipes has been laid
3. A 100yd fenced off, dog free, Woodland Walk with woodchip path and woodland flowers has been created with a large round the tree hexagonal bench made out of 400 year old wood reclaimed from the restoration of a local church
4. A pond area with rewilding around it for frogs etc

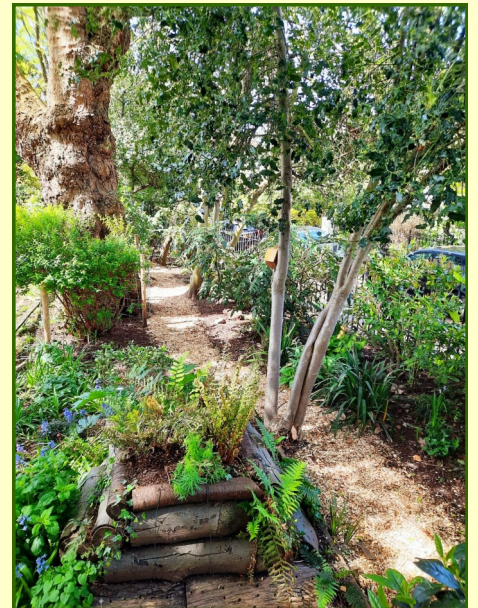
The restoration of a neglected inner city garden

5. 6 fruit trees were planted in the Western area to break up the view of the bald area and its 3 beds of London clay restored with sharp sand and horse manure
6. £6,000 has been raised to buy and put in place a central Georgian fountain (one was there 100 years ago) all foundations, construction and electrical works done by volunteers

The dog owners now all pick up and we have an enormous increase in visitors, many of whom simply come to sit on the 15 Barton benches to 'gongoose', eat lunch and socialise. With increasing numbers living in apartments without outside space we have many families with children using the fenced off lawn where we allow children's birthday parties, Summer and Halloween parties. The children love the Woodland Walk where we have rot-



ting piles of wood for them to discover insects etc. The working central water fountain is a favourite with visitors and also their dogs who love to jump in. Recently we have had evening live music (Carols and Beatles sung along badly!)

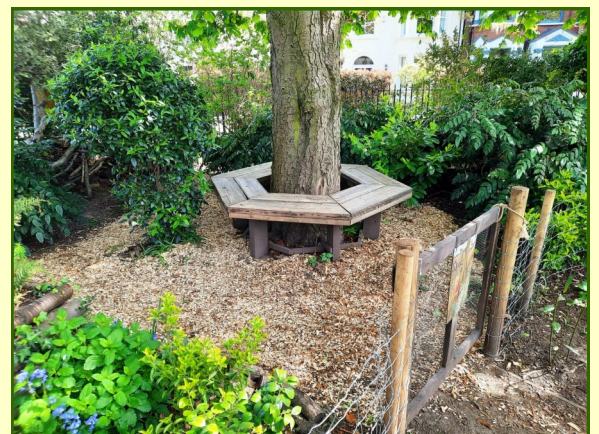


Daily there is a group of elderly who sit at a table, having made in the little kitchen tea and biscuits.

The community has really got to know each other. Indeed Patricia and I have got to know more locals in the past 4 years

than we got to know in the previous 35 years

It has always been my belief that whilst good ideas are worthy, it is the working together by volunteers which builds communities and community spirit with pride. The restoration of Thornhill Road Gardens has certainly proven it to be the case. It could also be done in Malindi to build community spirit, to educate and to visually improve the town.



Look us up www.cloudesleyassociation.org and www.thornhillgardens.org

Reports on our recent meetings



On the 24th April, about 35 members gathered at the home and garden of Carissa and Peter Nightingale on the beautiful shoreline of the Indian Ocean close to Vipingo Beach, namely Kinuni. As always we met for a social half hour to drink coffee and catch up, and to shop in the wonderful new KHS NCD pop-up shop now very well stocked and run by Maike Pottgeiter and proving very popular with all our members. The pop-up shop took over KSH40,000 in sales at this meeting alone.

The meeting began with a fascinating talk by Carissa about the history of the garden, created from bush by Carissa's mother, May Buxton, and a remarkable feat of horticultural engineering, including road-building to the site, an avenue of Neem trees, and the creation of paths, beachside seating, and an enormous variety of planting including the ever-popular but brief appearance of literally thousands of Scadoxus.

Carissa gave us the history of the house and garden, of the Swahili ruins on the plot, and of the Giriama scared caves situated some way behind the house. Peter Nightingale had prepared a wonderfully useful map for visitors to use as they explored the grounds, and there were information sheets available including a very comprehensive botanical guide to the garden's trees and shrubs. It was a terrific morning and our gratitude is due to Carissa and Peter for their kind hospitality and generosity in giving us access to such a remarkable garden.



On the 25th June more than 40 members gathered at the home and garden of Ana Parada in Malindi for a fascinating presentation on the life of bees. The talk was delivered by Nina Chauvel who farms bees on the island of Manda in the Lamu archipelago, and who is a self-taught expert. Nina delivered a talk that was extraordinary in

opening our eyes to the democratic and hugely well-organised behaviour of honey bees, how they nest, how they protect their home, how they breed, how they forage, and how honey and bees wax is produced and harvested. It would seem that humans may have a lot to learn about the democracy of honey bees, and Nina pointed us to a definitive book on the subject, Honeybee Democracy by Thomas D. Seeley, for members who wanted to know



more about these fascinating and short-lived creatures.



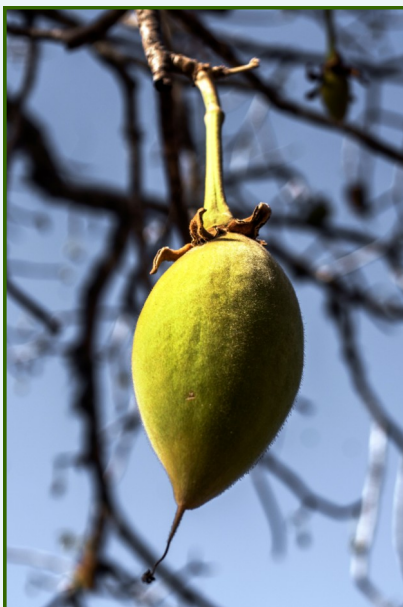
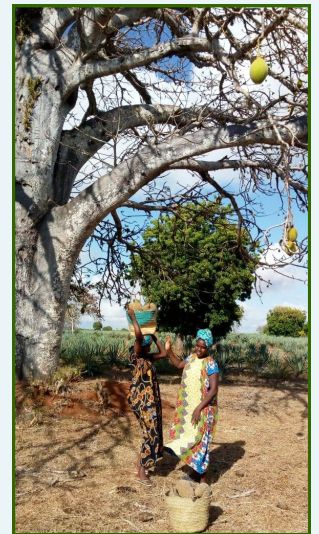
The pop-up shop, run by Maike Potgeiter, was a popular part of the meeting, and as always members enjoyed a welcoming cup of tea or coffee served by Holly Hamilton. Thanks to both Maike and Holly and especially to Nina and Ana for a very worthwhile meeting.

Seedling Designs

Seedling Designs: Our Story by Fabiana Alcojor and Roberto Gerosa

*Not many of us would dispute the fact that we KHS NCD members have a rather special relationship with *Adansonia digitata*, the Baobab tree. Fabiana and Roberto (both architects and kindred spirits, from Argentina and Italy respectively) are no exceptions but, as they narrate in their story, theirs is a unique relationship...*

The story of Seedling Designs starts when we opted for a quieter and simpler lifestyle away from the hustle and bustle of cities like London to work on a two-year volunteer project in a small remote community near Homa Bay on the shores of Lake Victoria. Here we helped to build an orphanage using merely the strength of our hands and the natural materials that we could find around us without the aid of running water or electricity. This immersion in a lifestyle devoid of modern conveniences was the beginning of a transformative experience for us shaping our perspectives on design, sustainability and the value of handmade craftsmanship and the desire to integrate nature into our work. And it was this experience we wanted to carry forward and apply to our future professional - and personal - lives.



Our move to the coastal town of Kilifi marked the place where this was to happen. Indeed, it is where the idea of Seedling Designs, our eco-sustainable lighting design brand, germinated. Roberto resumed his work as an architect while I stayed home with our newly born son, Julian. We lived in a small, simple house with minimal furniture and just bare lightbulbs hanging from the ceiling, finding pleasure in our walks on the beach, experiencing magnificent sunrises and sunsets, and collecting pods from the many majestic baobab trees growing in



the Bofa neighbourhood. A humble-looking pod, as the photo shows, but it was their wonderful, elliptical shape that intrigued and inspired us: they became the focal point of our new design philosophy.

Seedling Designs continued.

But more than that...one evening, with our son restless and the room lit by one bare light bulb, inspiration struck. Taking one of the pods that was cracked and hollow, I placed it on top of the bulb to dim the light: the atmosphere changed immediately and Julian became calm. This moment sparked the idea of creating lamps from the pods, an idea which we pursued with hope and confidence. After cutting off the bottom section of each and removing the pulp, fibre and seeds, then, with meticulous care and reverence, these humble pods were transformed into exquisite lamps, each one unique, each one a testament to the beauty of nature and the ingenuity of human hands.

Initially, we made lamps for friends; as demand grew, so did our belief in the idea. We started hiring women from the community with good manual skills, like hairdressers and beauticians, to help us with the production and as a way of integrating the business into the local environment, something which we wanted to achieve. We established a small workshop, focusing on perfecting a few products rather than creating many. Our experiences in Europe, England and America had taught us to value small, well-defined, and refined pieces, embracing the ethos of African handmade design. Initially, our clientele was primarily Western, but understanding the interests of African customers became increasingly important.

So, as we hope our story tells, our business, Seedling Designs, has emerged from our desire to reconnect with simplicity, sustainability, and nature, transforming humble baobab seed pods into symbols of our journey and commitment to eco-friendly, hand-crafted design.



Photo credits: *Adansonia digitata* pod, Pod collecting: Lucy Favier (Favier Productions, Kenya); Lamps, Fabiana Alcojor

Odds and Ends

Readers of The Shamba Times may remember a piece we featured in the January 2023 issue. It was titled *A Historic ReWilding* and told the story of the infamous Ellen Willmott of Warley Gardens in Essex in the UK.

Well, Ms. Willmott has finally been honoured as a gardener of repute as reported in April 2024 in this cutting from The Times newspaper.

Gun-toting 'bad girl of gardening' honoured at last

APRIL 2024

Jack Blackburn History Correspondent
Charlotte Alt

She has been called the bad girl of horticulture and was known for being headstrong, cantankerous, and even carried a gun.

However, Ellen Willmott's eccentric character and misconceptions about her conduct meant the internationally significant gardener has gone largely unrecognised for more than a century.

Now, the Royal Horticultural Society has given her a belated honour by dedicating a summerhouse to her at RHS Wisley, in Woking, a garden that Willmott helped to purchase.

Matthew Pottage, curator of Wisley, said: "For decades, Ellen Willmott was only known for scattering sea holly seeds in unwanted places and being cantankerous. It is time to properly acknowledge the drive, vision, and abilities of this horticultural heavyweight."

Willmott co-sponsored plant-collecting expeditions that introduced new species to cultivation and almost 200 of them were named after her. She also created three extensive gardens across Europe, including Warley Place in Essex.

She was closely involved with the RHS for about 40 years until her death in 1934. However, the relationship was always strained.

Willmott could be rude and feisty. In 1897 she became the subject of disapproval when she did not attend the inauguration ceremony of the Victoria Medal of Honour, awarded by the RHS to 60 horticulturalists of which all but two were



The summerhouse at RHS Wisley is a belated tribute to Ellen Willmott, below

men. New research, however, suggests her absence was not a snub but instead because she suffered from heartbreak as her close friend, and possibly lover, Gian Tufnell was getting married to Lord George Mount Stephens.

This emerged from research of Willmott's rediscovered letters studied by Sandra Lawrence, who wrote the book *Miss Willmott's Ghosts: The Extraordinary Life and Gardens of a Forgotten Genius*.

Willmott remained heavily involved with the RHS and six years after the perceived snub facilitated the society's ownership of what later became RHS Garden Wisley. Pottage said: "Her early influence here is significant and we've just never shared this story, partly because the facts haven't been clear enough." He said it felt right to "give her her moment".

Willmott was known to like summer houses, having built eight at Warley Place, and Wisley decided to construct one in her honour at Oakwood, the historic part of the garden that she would have remembered.



Diary of upcoming NCD events

23 July 2024 at 1000. To be announced



Saturday 24 August 2024 at 1000. Aquaponics

We invite members to visit The Hanging Gardens just outside Malindi for a talk and practical demonstration of aquaponics. Aquaponics is about water, fish and plants and how the three can work together. We give members an opportunity to visit Nick Conway's well-established pond and to hear about how it was created, stocked with fish, and planted.

This is our first ever meeting on a Saturday and we hope it offers members who work a chance to attend at least some of our monthly meetings. We shall see.

September 2024 at 1000. To be announced.

KHS North Coast District



North Coast District Contacts

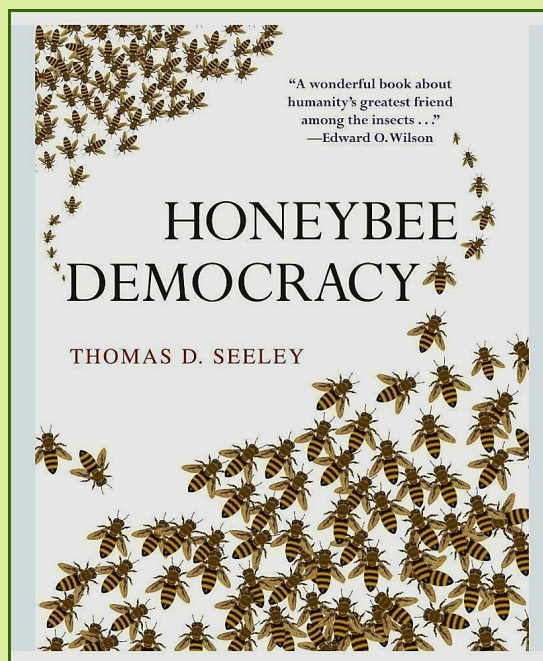
Chairman **Mr Crispin Sharp**
sharpcrispin@hotmail.com

Hon Sec This post remains open

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

NCD MPESA 0702 767 177

NCD Shop To be announced.



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