

Celebrating Lukusitsi

Restoration (*ufufuo*) is a beautiful idea.

Something wonderful might have been worn away, stolen or replaced; when we restore we somehow make it better and stronger.

The work of **Plants for Life** in the Lukusitsi section of Kakamega Forest is truly remarkable; once pristine forest had been replaced with monocrop, anaerobic cypress plantations then invaded by the choking guava bushes, devoid of the insect, bird and mycelial life which signal a healthy, productive environment.



And so it was with great joy that KHS members from around the country gathered with their guests to celebrate the astonishing bravery and perseverance of Dr. Mark Nicholson, Cheryl Achesa and their team.

Following an enlightening visit to **Arboretum KaJok'Oby** on the Friday before the big day, where we were welcomed in grand style by Hilda and the Obyrodhiamo family, a group of over 100 participants met at **Rondo Retreat** on the morning of Saturday April 18th (the closest weekend day to the actual day of celebration, April 15th.) From Rondo we walked through the magnificent rain forest to the **Lukusitsi River** site, where we were met by Mark and Cheryl, the Community Forest Association members and 4 armed KFS Forest Guards. Let's hope KFS become a stronger, more active partner in the future.

The group divided itself organically and proceeded through the restoration centre, guided by the experts; the area has been carefully fenced and seedlings planted with care and skill to maximise the symbiosis. I was particularly delighted to see a specimen (local variant?) of the mysterious *Amorphophallus abyssinicus* (cousin to the famous Titan Arum).

As the weather was kindly, as were the Rondo management, we were able to gather in the glorious gardens of the Retreat, under the watchful eye of the Juvenile Crowned Eagle nesting above, in the giant *Antiaris toxicaris* tree. Music came from the traditional Luhya sound, **Kabras Classic Band**; their instruments perfectly matching the inspiring forest surrounds. **Brian Nyamanga** sang his glorious Luo ballads including the timeless Kothbiro, but in his own inimitable style. Our esteemed National Secretary, **Wanjugu Wambugu**, told us why being a part of the **Kenya Horticultural Society** is a great idea, after we had sung her the Kenyan Happy Birthday song! **Nyokabi Njuguna** of **Kiasili Afrikana** reminded us of the power and potency of our healing plants, whilst **Oby Obyrodhiambo** enthralled us with the story of Makora the Wizard. **Jagpal** and **Tina Sandhu** fed us delicious snacks and then we divided up into sub-species – some being guided by **Mark Nicholson** in the arcane art of Plant Identification, whilst others painted a delightful mural with **Harriet Matseart**; and a few just enjoyed making new friends and connections which have already begun to bear fruit. **Miti Alliance** is already planning an event with **Plants for Life** for World Environment Day from June 5-7.



We were all thrilled about the participation of younger people in the event; children bring such a great energy to any occasion and have a way of making us see things in a brighter light. Karibuni gardeners and foresters of the future!

It has been a truly heart-warming and encouraging gathering, and we are most grateful to those who supported the venture. **Kenya Horticultural Society**, of course, especially the Kisumu Branch. **Plants for Life**, David, Alem and the team at **Rondo Retreat, Arboretum KaJok'Oby, Dunga Hill Camp, Nakuru, Nairobi and Thika KHS Districts** for their contributions and all the individuals who purchased trees and gave gifts, advice and support.

Special thanks to **Rading' Nyamwaya Obyerodhyambo (Radee), Arjun Kohli, Mike Waiyaki** for their photo contributions.

Personally - I would do it all again.

Keith Pearson, KHS National Council Member & Coordinator

Some Considered Opinions

OBY OBYRODHIAMBO

The involvement of the Community Forest Associates was my high moment. The indigenous knowledge they had and shared so generously touched me and renewed my faith in conservation of the same.

The networking and bonding across generations and professions was wonderful. This was a wonderfully neutral space devoid of our Kenyan political noise.

Nyokabi made a powerful statement about "telling stories about our trees and forests" this is something that KHS can coordinate and encourage.

OLUOCH MADIANG

MAJOR Impressive Fact for me was the involvement and engagement of children, and how enthusiastically they participated in the whole event. Even serving food, watering plantlings, dancing, walking, painting, etc.

NYOKABI NJUGUNA

I think my fascination was the Tiriki model that showed us that conservation and preservation is not just protection—it is culture, structure, and responsibility.

RUTH RISPER ABIR

The event was an inspiration to my little ones with whom the conservation of indigenous plants 'bug' bit.











