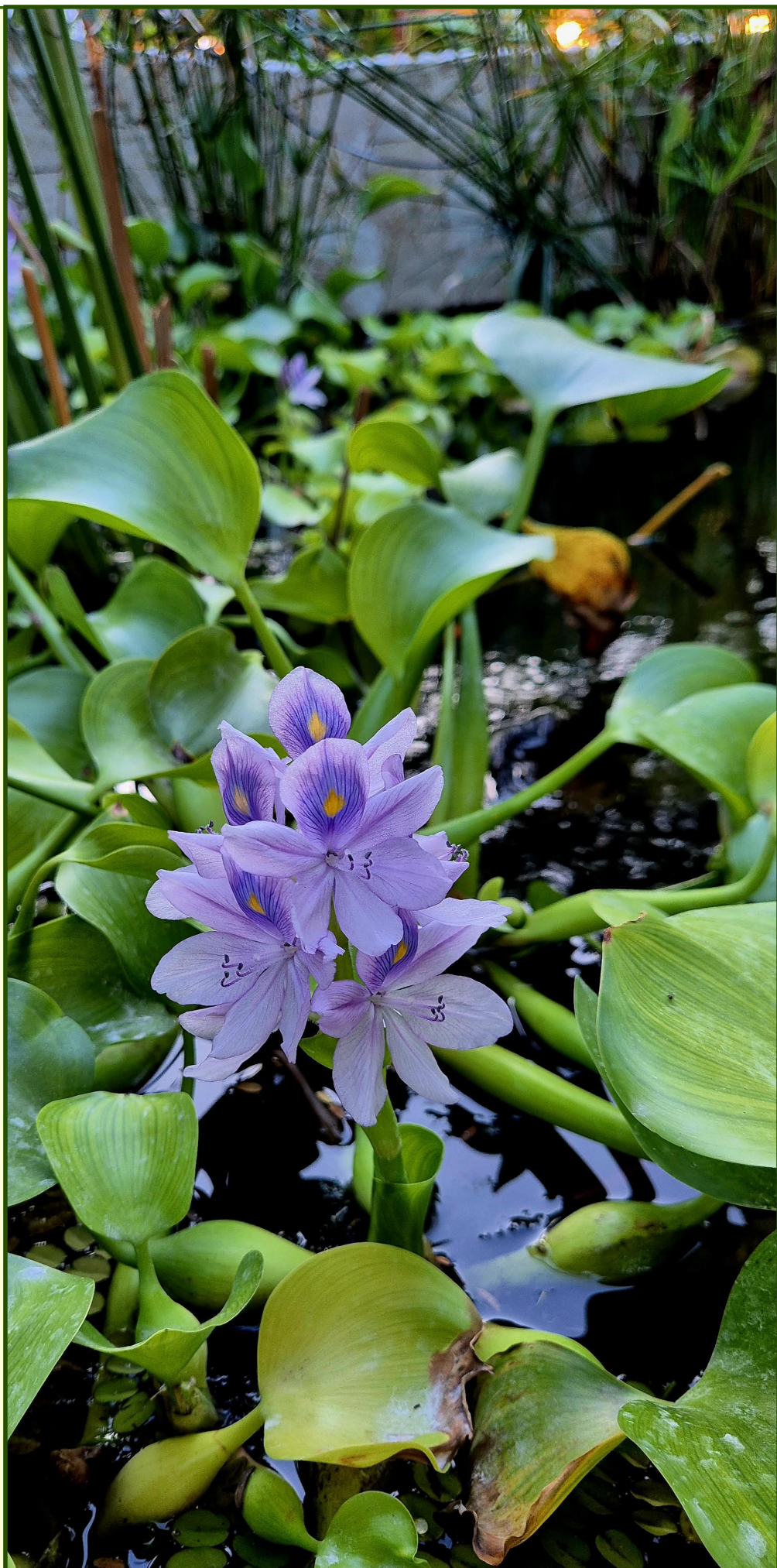


**October
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The Shamba Times

Kenya Horticultural Society North Coast District



North Coast District

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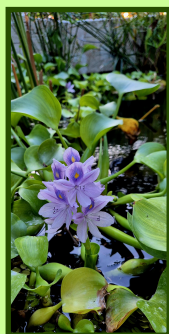
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Our cover photo

Our cover photo for this edition of The Shamba Times is of *Eichhornia crassipes*, Water Hyacinth, spotted in a member's garden pond



in Malindi. Whilst the plant may be attractive, at least above the surface, it is in fact a dangerous invasive and one that is notoriously disruptive in Lake Victoria and many other waterways all around the globe.

The antidote to the uncontrolled spread of water hyacinth may be Brazilian *Neochetina* weevils whose larvae tunnel into the plants and destroy their growing points, thereby allowing water and rot to penetrate.

Water hyacinth, when removed from the water, can be turned into bio-gas and may form a useful fuel for cooking. But this plant is one not to be trifled with.

Chairman's Notes

Hello everybody, and welcome to this the October 2026 edition of The Shamba Times.

Each quarterly edition of The Shamba Times owes its design and lay-outs to Microsoft Publisher, a tool that has been around since the original Microsoft suite of PC tools was launched many moons ago. Publisher is easy to use and happens to have a set of templates and tools that make creating The Shamba Times each quarter a relatively easy task.

But, as of October 1st, Microsoft are 'retiring' Publisher and we will no longer be able to use the application, nor even to access previous files held within it. This is not good news for old dogs who, as we know, cannot be taught new tricks.

So, expect a new-look Shamba Times on January 1st next year. Who knows what it may look like or how radical any changes will have to be, but time will tell.

But I hope that you will agree with me that the value of The Shamba Times lies not in its appearance, but in the quality of the content within. For that we have to thank our principal editor and regular contributor, Wendy Taylor, who has been enormously successful in keeping a steady stream of interesting, relevant, and often topical content coming this way.

It is Wendy we have to thank for persuading property owners to let us into their gardens in each edition, and in assisting our gardeners to share their gardening stories with us too. Our Botany Lessons come from Wendy's research and compilations, along with many other valuable learnings, along with much much more.

Thank you Wendy. See you in a new format in January.

Crispin Sharp

Plants and trees of the NCD.

A gallery of members' recent photographs



Adenium obesum

Kaiungu Gome, Malindi



Bauhinia mombassae

Mimi Shaw, Malindi



Bauhinia monandra

Crispin Sharp, Malindi



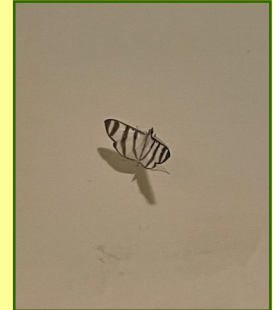
Lymantrid Moth

Angela Turner, Shanzu



Orange Acraea male

Lolo, Kilifi



Zebronia phenice

Colleen Street, Vipingo



Orchid

Mariola Salioli, Malindi



Curcuma longa Turmeric

Moses Charo, Kilifi



Tillandsia ionantha

Ana Parada, Malindi



Tree frog

Mimi Shaw, Malindi



Sesbania

Angela Turner, Shanzu



Agave

Frederick Randu, Watamu

What's up on WhatsApp?

From Caterpillar to Butterfly by Ursula Brenneisen

During the month of July, 2026, many of us will have been intrigued by Ursula Brenneisen's series of What's App postings that tracked two stages of the life cycle of butterflies. In their life cycles, butterflies (and moths) undergo complete metamorphosis, passing through four distinct stages: the egg stage, then the larval or caterpillar stage (focused on feeding and growth), followed by a pupal stage (when no feeding occurs) during which the larva undergoes an amazing transformation, and the final adult (reproductive) stage. Here Ursula elaborates on how she facilitated the last two stages of the cycle with a little technical assistance from Steve Collins.

Last year I spent some weeks in Switzerland with my daughter who was excited over having "produced" some swallowtail butterflies using a netted butterfly cage. She and her husband had discovered some caterpillars that were eating the fennel in their garden. They managed to buy a cage into which they placed some of the caterpillars with a supply of fennel. This the caterpillars eat greedily and hence had to be replaced regularly. They watched the caterpillars pupate and eventually turn into butterflies which they then released. I was fascinated and ordered such a net to take back to Shanzu with me with the intention of repeating this exercise, which I did this July, as follows.

In July, my gardener, Suleiman, pointed out a red caterpillar on a small *Acridocarpus zanzibaricus* plant, which showed signs of having been nibbled. It disappeared before I had a chance to photograph it.

9 July Today, I saw a green caterpillar on the same plant, as illustrated.



11 July I saw that the green caterpillar had pupated and turned black and was hanging on the leaf of the *Acridocarpus* plant, as illustrated. It was time to make use of my netted butterfly cage!



Continued ...

13 July As the *Acridocarpus* plant was small, I decided to transplant it to a pot and put it inside the butterfly cage (see photo 3 below).



14 July Alex went on a walk with our dog along the Shanzu cliffside and discovered red caterpillars on the big *Acridocarpus* plants there. He brought me six of them together with a supply of *Acridocarpus* leaves on twigs (see photo 4 below). I put the caterpillars plus the leaves into the butterfly cage.

16 July Four of the red caterpillars have now pupated and are hanging on the net of the

cage.

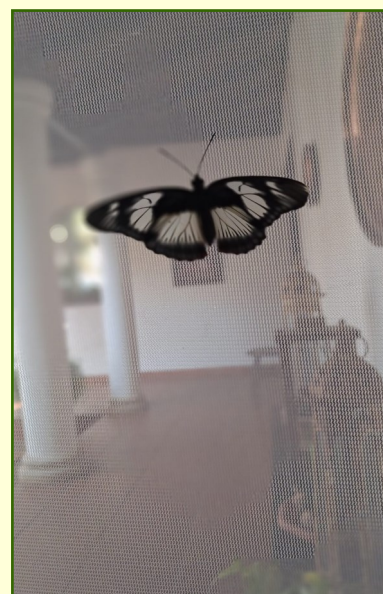
17 July Two are motionless and are lying in the curled leaves of the *Acridocarpus* plant.

18 July The red caterpillars have now all pupated and are fixed to various parts of the net.

20 July My first butterfly has appeared! Hatched from the green caterpillar's pupa. I learn

that it is a False Diadem *Pseudacraea Lucretia*, as illustrated.

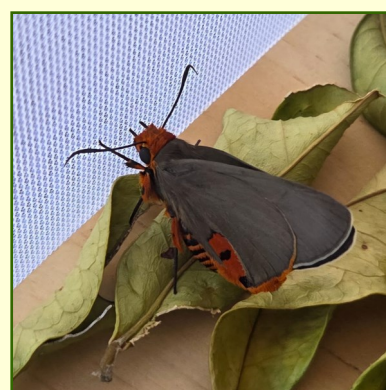
22 July Now I am waiting to see the six pupas of the red caterpillar develop into butterflies.



29 July Today, two butterflies appeared from the red caterpillar pupa. They are called Red

Tab Policeman *Coeliades mombasae*.

31 July Another Policeman hatched today. The only shots we were able to take were of the resting butterflies with their wings folded, as illustrated. Reference to 'Butterflies of East Africa' Dino J Martins & Steve Collins shows that the wings are brown and suffused with orange.



Now, at the end of July, I await the hatching of the three remaining pupas.

A Kilifi Creek Garden

The plot is roughly 160 yards deep and, on average, 56 yards wide; almost 2 acres. The drive curves along the plot up to the house which overlooks the north side of the Creek and, through the miango, to the Indian Ocean. It is difficult to decide which is the front and the back in this case. Arguably the entrance to the plot and to the house is the front. But the view at the end of the plot is of the sea-front. I will try not to get muddled.

For the most part, walls surround the plot. There is a gate in the northeast corner leading to a long flight of steps down to the Creek. Chickens and geese inhabit the entrance end of the plot but the geese often venture up to the front of the house and occasionally round to the swimming pool for a drink.

The garden is well established with a lot of grass which we are fortunate to be able to keep reasonably green. The garden cannot be described as a flower garden and it would be too pretentious to call it a park.



There are several large *Terminalia* and Neems. There are quite a few indigenous trees many of which have been planted relatively recently. Several are mature, such as two Baobabs, Gardenias, an Mbambakofi, a *Brachestygia*, and a *Lannea schweinfurthi* which attracts thousands of bees when it flowers. We are contemplating removing some non-indigenous trees such as two very large magnificent Neems, all the *Leucaenna leucocephala*, which spread like wildfire, and some of the failing Flamboyants.

After the entrance the drive curves to the right to avoid a very steep sided valley leading to the Creek. The valley inspires lots of ambitious ideas. One of the Neem trees is on the other side of the valley. However, it shades the bank and we are thinking smaller indigenous trees, such as the *Croton megalacarpoides*, native to the coast and endangered, might do well if the Neem was removed (we know of a *Croton* nearby from which we might be able to gather seeds, also a certain tree expert!).



by Robert Horner

Similarly, native Cycads, ferns and the *Scadoxus multiflorus* (Fire Lily), with other similar small plants accessed by gentle winding paths could be planted. Perhaps even a lily pond with a lot of hungry mosquito-eating fish might be a good idea to replace the rather ugly concrete goose pond.

The other magnificent Neem is on the other side of the drive but there is also an equally splendid Terminalia which is shielded from the house by the Neem. Smaller, flowering indigenous trees might be better and we could probably exchange the Neem wood for the cost of the felling and removal.

At the front (the sea side of the house), clinging to the cliff edge, we have a magnificent but rather ugly *Sterculia africana* with pretty little flowers and



spectacular seed heads. There is also a very attractive self set young Terminalia. Down the

steps there are some native vanilla orchids (*Vanilla roscheri*) and several others that we have not yet identified.



To the left of the Sterculia where no horticulture can take place, due to its inaccessibility, it is unlikely there's anything that is not indigenous. One is an endangered *Vitellariopsis kirkii*.

Finally, one of the features of the garden is the seemingly endless variety of fungi, bugs, butterflies, birds and reptiles. The

snakes are alarming but can be relocated by local experts. The ferocious looking monitors are more frightened of us. This one had to be pulled free and thrown over the fence.



We do resort to bumping off mosquitos and knocking down hornet nests that are a bit too low-lying for comfort.

Thanks go to Norbert Rottcher for identifying some of the plants.

A Botany Lesson

A Botany Lesson: Race to save Kenya's rarest tree species - one seedling at a time by Dr Geoffrey Mwachala and Dr Veronicah Ngumbau

This article continues our series 'A Botany Lesson' but, as you will read, a lesson with a difference. Deep in the Kaya forests of Kilifi County, which hold both cultural heritage and extraordinary biodiversity, a quiet rescue mission is underway. Botanists in collaboration with the local communities are racing against the clock to rescue two of Kenya's 'most endangered' tree species. The National Museums of Kenya has launched a new bold initiative "Using integrative approaches in conservation of threatened Cola species in the coastal forests of Kilifi County, Kenya" funded by Fondation Franklinia of Switzerland.

The species in question, *Cola porphyrantha* and *Cola octoloboides*, though not household names, represent something priceless: a living piece of Kenya coastal forest heritage that could vanish within a generation. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) lists *C. porphyrantha* as Critically Endangered and *C. octoloboides* as Endangered a sobering classification that has spurred National Museums of Kenya into action.

Rather than relying on a single intervention, the project takes a layered approach to conservation. Scientists together with the local communities are first mapping where these trees still survive and cataloguing the threats closing in on them. Through this approach more populations are being discovered contrary to earlier findings by other botanists. Subsequently, the team is developing propagation protocols for growing these species in nurseries so they can eventually be replanted in the wild. The project also invests in people: training local communities on alternative livelihoods to ease pressure on forests and build conservation awareness from the ground up. Degraded patches of the forests are being brought back to life through enrichment planting of threatened and indigenous species to restore their health and connect fragmented habitats. It is a collaborative effort by design, drawing together local communities, schools, government agencies, non-profits, and academic institutions - recognising that forest conservation succeeds only when everyone with a stake in the landscape is at the table. were planted in 2025 and 2026 to check on their recovery.

Compiled by Wendy Taylor

In August 2026, the project team; Itambo Malombe, Peris Kamau, Veronicah Ngumbau and Geoffrey Mwachala worked in the Pangani, Jibana, Kambe landscape to take stock of progress. Their work spanned three fronts: assessing the condition of the community-run nurseries, evaluating the propagation efforts at these nurseries and mapping the targeted species across the forest landscape. The team also assessed the conditions of the degraded sites that were planted in 2025 and 2026 to check on their recovery.

The results are encouraging: nurseries have successfully produced seedlings of not only of the two Cola species but of several other threatened tree species including *Angylocalyx braunii*, *Mkilua fragrans* (as illustrated), *Erythrina scaleuxii* and *Julbernardia magnistipula*.

For the National Museums of Kenya, the fight to save Cola species is a test case for how scientific rigour, community partnership, and cultural stewardship of the Kaya forests can work together to hold back the rising tide of habitat loss along the Kenya coast and proof that even the most obscure, unheralded species are worth the fight.



About the authors:

Dr. Geoffrey Mwachala is Chief Research Scientist at the National Museums of Kenya

Dr. Veronicah Ngumbau is Senior Research Scientist at the National Museums of Kenya

My Gardening Story

Introduction

Simon Ngunjiri continues our series where we ask KHS NCD gardener members to write about their lives whether as farmers, gardeners or horticulturists. He shares his experience of regenerative organic farming practices, with 'organic' meaning growing food without synthetic chemicals or GMOs - focusing on input rules, and 'regenerative' relating to actively healing the land, focusing on soil health, biodiversity, and restoring ecosystems. It should be noted, however, that, beyond these practices, then to operate and label produce as a certified organic farmer, verification through local and/or international certification bodies has also to be secured.

My name is Simon Ngunjiri. I am a regenerative organic farming practitioner producing safe food for a healthy lifestyle as the Silanga Farm Manager. My journey of farming started from a young age having been born into a farming family in Nyahururu. We would be given a small portion of land to practise farming on and to earn some money to buy ourselves necessities such as books, school uniforms, and shoes, and for paying for school tours.

After my school life, I had an opportunity to move here - to Kilifi to look for a job. In my search, I was so lucky to meet my immediate bosses and mentors, Madam Betty and Mr Christopher Wilson. They have taken me into the deeper depths of farming, giving me knowledge and expertise, and mentorship in what I need to do to achieve my goals. I have also been on farm tours, workshops and expos, which have broadened my knowledge of farming.

It has been a journey that has had challenges particularly when we first started the horticulture section at our Kilifi Plantations farm. We experienced a hard time growing different crops as we didn't know enough about, for example, which crop varieties do well here; how to take care of the soil and nature; pest control measures; or, how to handle losses due to crop yield failure. But with time, learning and a word from my able mentors about not giving up, I have grown to be a regenerative organic farming practitioner who can do things on my own and get results.



By Simon Ngunjiri

My love for regenerative organic farming came from the push I got from Madam Betty as it wasn't easy to believe that I could do farming organically without using inputs from the shops and chemicals that harm crops, soil, friendly insects and even human beings, or by growing cover crops that won't make any money but instead add nutrients to the soil; and, by working "in cooperation" with the soil. With time I saw the results of this approach and I came to believe that it works. My goal is to grow and produce food that is safe for the community and also to make farmers and people believe and trust that it is possible to grow food organically.

The farm produce we grow organically includes spinach (see photo on the previous page), kale, amaranthus, egg plants, cabbages, tomatoes, herbs, sweet potatoes - both red-skinned ones known as Red Garnet, and white ones (which are best for diabetics) plus vines, as illustrated, pawpaws, both red and white onions, and bananas.



What I like about regenerative organic farming is that everything goes back to amending the soil e.g. we make compost from leaves, stalks and small shrubs; when we prune trees and clear shrubs around the farm, we then make biochar; we feed worms with vegetable and kitchen waste to make vermicompost, which is our best source of compost; and we use cow manure and goat manure in making our compost. I don't think there is anything which I dislike about organic farming: it is a learning experience and it is a passion of mine. My farming tips are: take care of the soil and the environment and they will give back their best to you; and, compost, mulch and water the crops with discipline and you will get the best yield. Regenerative organic farming is the way to keep our and future generations healthy and safe.

Reports on our recent meetings

Integrated Pest Management - a talk by Johnny Owles on Saturday 25 July 2026

Around 30 members visited Jane and Johnny Owles at their home on the creek at Kilifi, where Johnny gave a talk on his 40 year horticultural career in flowers and vegetables, and how Integrated Pest Management played a vital part in pest control. He gave examples of the nitrogen-fixing legume, Desmodium, used in the push-pull cropping system.

He then went on to explain how, when managing the large flower farms, they discovered that leafminer was controlled by a naturally-occurring parasitic wasp after 12 weeks, and how it was helped by using Neem oil at the correct stages of cycle, as a natural deterrent. He explained how Beetle-banks, Set-aside, and Hedgerows of indigenous wild flowers, shrubs, bushes and trees helped the predatory parasites to survive and multiply.



Johnny then went on to explain how climate-controlled greenhouses greatly improved crop production whilst also preventing the need for fungicides and pesticides, and how the predatory spider mite could be bred to control the Red Spider Mite. He then showed members the 10,000 live predatory mites that he had got from Thika's IPM farm, before going on to explain about Trichoderma harzianum, a highly beneficial fungus used as a natural bio-fungicide, bio-fertilizer and plant growth promoter, and how it colonizes the root zone to outcompete harmful soil-borne pathogens.

Johnny explained about the large number of predatory parasites found in Kenya that controlled the pests we all hate like mealybugs, whiteflies, aphids, and mites.

He then described the soup of fertilizers he uses to improve the soil and invigorate the plants to make them stronger and healthier.

He described his 6 years as a technical manager touring Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Malawi, Zambia, Rwanda and Swaziland, routinely visiting and auditing over 150 farms growing vegetables, avocados, tea, coffee, sugar, herbs and fruit for Sainsbury's, the world's largest Fair Trade supermarket, and how he also audited cardboard packaging factories, canning factories, Modified Atmospheric Packaging factories and printing manufacturers.

Along the way he learnt how different farms used different methods to control the same pest, and how altitude and weather patterns affected those decisions.

Many thanks are due to Holly for the usual tea and coffee service and to Maike for making the KHS Pop-Up shop happen at the event.

Continued ...

Indigenous Plants: Bringing Kenyan Gardens back to Life

This was the title of Norbert Rottcher's talk given to an audience of some 50 people from all sub-districts of KHS NCD amongst whom were several new faces (both recently-joined members or potentially so) on Thursday, 3 September, 2026. The venue? Norbert's new house amid his restored forest. Had the subject-matter of his talk been presented as once mooted: The Great Debate, Indigenous vs Exotic, we could probably have expected some feisty exchange of views. Instead, with Norbert perched on the steps leading up to the upper floor of his house, it came across more like a pastor delivering his sermon from a pulpit



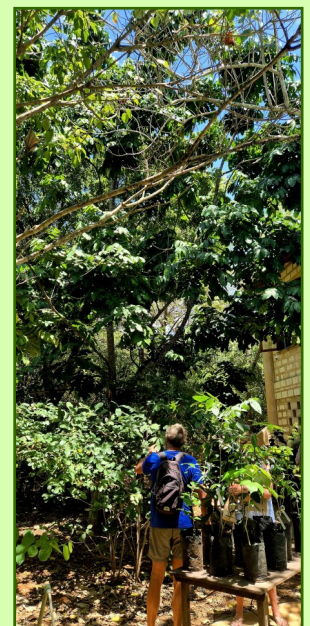
preaching to the converted and/or seeking to win over the sceptics - and an illustrated sermon at that! Calmly, gently and in a non-hectoring manner, he presented his argument: that the beautifully manicured, exotic gardens in Kenya are ecologically barren or lifeless - they are "green deserts" which cannot be used by birds, caterpillars, butterflies, other dudus. Trees like neem might have many useful by-products but they are useless to the local ecosystem. They contribute nothing to Kenya's incredible biodiversity, which is under threat. It was time for us to rebalance our gardens in favour of indigenous and reap the benefits thereof.



He provided not only scientific knowledge to support his case but pictorial evidence, too: many examples of indigenous trees and shrubs captured in bloom with beautiful and brightly coloured flowers.

His forest restoration project was another example - which those present could witness. Started in 2015, the indigenous trees, which were planted on three acres of former sisal plantation land are now 12 metres high with a closed canopy, an eco-system which belongs to the local landscape - and home to the Narina trogon bird. After the talk and the Q&A session, there was time to check out the many live

specimens from Norbert's adjoining indigenous tree nursery, which were on display for members to see and purchase, and to commune with nature in his forest. Thanks to all who organised this very fine KHS NCD event.



KHS Meetings continued ...

KHS members visit a lovely garden in North Malindi - 18th September 2026.

At our usual 10 o'clock for 1030, around 35 members gathered at the lovely garden and home of Dipa Vagani in North Malindi. We were greeted by a welcome cup of coffee and cake, and the KHS Pop-Up Shop, run by Maike Potgeiter, was in full swing with a wide range of garden tools, feeds, pots, potions and all things useful for the garden.

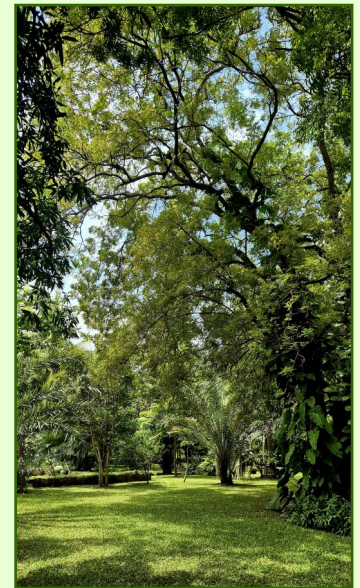
It was a day of showers and sunshine but our spirits were not to be dampened and after being welcomed to her garden by Dipa, members gathered to listen to a very interesting talk on the fragrance of



plants, shrubs and trees and how nature has

been at the centre of

the development of perfumes and fragrances for thousands of years. The talk was delivered by Mimi Shaw, who recounted a story of the night in Tsavo East when an elephant had pulled down a branch



from a tree under whose boughs Mimi and her husband were sleeping in a canvas tent. The next morning the branch was still there, red wood and Mimi decided to sniff it and see whether it was giving off any scent, and oh yes, it was. The scent and the tree would have gone unnoticed were it not for the hungry elephant's desire to munch upon the branch. As Mimi explained, the Kenyan bush is simply full of plants of fragrance and of medicinal properties - a natural store of perfumes just waiting to be discovered.

After the talk, Dipa led members into the garden to identify the many shrubs and trees of fragrance that she has planted there, and we were treated to wonderful displays of orchids, bromeliads, climbers, creepers and all sorts in the expansive, calm, green and tranquil space that is a garden only eight years old. A lovely garden indeed and a morning very well spent.

Very many thanks are due to Dipa for her kind hospitality and for inviting members into her very lovely garden. Thank you.



Odds and Ends

Quote of the Quarter

This shot of Drummond Castle Gardens, Perthshire, Scotland, with the caption ‘A colourful reminder that there IS green somewhere in Britain...,’ was posted by Matilda Thompson on our platform on 8 August, 2026, together with a description thereof. The gardens were originally laid out in the 1630s by the 2nd Earl of Perth and later, in the 19th century, restored and reshaped by Clementine Sarah Drummond and her husband, Lord Willoughby de Eresby into a vast formal parterre as seen today. The gardens were subsequently simplified, replanted and revitalised in the mid-1950s by Phyllis Astor, wife of the 3rd Earl of Ancaster.

Quote of the Quarter comes from Suzanne Bateman, who responded to the above by saying: “People in those days treated plants and flowers like tapestry.” And, for those not familiar with the word ‘tapestry’ - a heavy handwoven reversible textile used for wall hangings, curtains, and upholstery created by coloured side threads (weft) passed over and under base threads (warp) to build a picture or pattern.

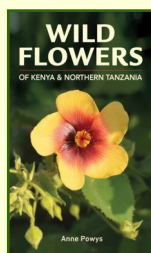


Green Peace

According to an article in the British news magazine, *The Spectator*, of 1 August, 2026, *Monstera deliciosa*, an exotic species which we know thrives well outdoors at the Coast, is perhaps “the most popular houseplant of them all, probably because it’s so easy to care for.” A heatwave, however, akin to those which the English population has become used to this summer, can put a *Monstera* under stress. For this reason, the article contends, “there might be the temptation to turn to a shockingly popular alternative: the plastic plant (hence, the title of the piece, *Plastic plants* - by Ella Veakins). “It should be resisted at all costs” she argues.

Apparently, “You can now purchase just about any kind of fake houseplant...as tropical as possible and as rare as you like” and at a bargain price. In the author’s opinion, however, these fakes are “absolutely ghastly”; they are monstrosities not *Monstera*s; and their presence “creates a strange atmosphere of unease.” But, more enlighteningly, she tells us there is a good scientific reason to embrace real greenery. “The human eye is more sensitive to green wavelengths than to any other part of the visible spectrum. We can distinguish subtle variations in the colour with remarkable precision. This evolutionary advantage probably helped our ancestors identify healthy vegetation and sources of food in their forest surroundings... It is a colour with which we remain instinctively at ease...Numerous studies have also associated exposure to natural greenery with lower stress levels and reduced heart rates.” Hence Green Peace! WT.

Diary of upcoming NCD events



Saturday 24 October 2026. A Talk by Ann Powys.

We invite members to attend a talk by renowned Kenyan botanist and eco-champion, Ann Powys, author of Wild Flowers of Kenya and Northern Tanzania, and advocate for the protection of Kenya's natural flora. Ann Powys grew up on a working cattle ranch in northern Kenya and spent much of her childhood exploring the bush. She has a keen interest in wildlife and the environment and is particularly passionate and knowledgeable about indigenous plants and their uses. Ann Powys is a lady of many parts and her talk to KHS NCD is an opportunity not to be missed



Saturday 28 November 2026. A KHS lunch at an amazing shoreline garden in Kiruwitu, south of Kilifi.

We invite all KHS North Coast District to attend a KHS lunch at the well-known home and garden of Carissa and Peter Nightingale on the shores of the Indian Ocean at Kiruwitu (Vipingo Beach). We shall offer members a very reasonably priced buffet lunch, a cash bar, the KHS NCD Pop-Up Shop, and an opportunity to join a guided walk around an extraordinary garden, containing Swahili ruins, Giriama sacred caves, and a plethora of coastal plants.



Friday 25 December 2026. The Christmas Day dhow on Mida Creek at Watamu.

This year the KHS Christmas Day dhow sets sail with members to cruise the Mida Creek and to offer members and their guests a full Christmas lunch aboard complete with all the drinks you can manage. This is truly a great way to celebrate Christmas in the company of KHS friends. Not to be missed.

KHS North Coast District



KENYA HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY

Gardening Kenya

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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.