



Members of Mwaroko Youth Group plant trees to restore degraded areas of Chawia forest. PHOTO: GILBAY OBUNGA

## Supporting Local Communities to Reverse Forest Loss and Deterioration

By Gilbay Obunga

Forests cover nearly one-third of our planet's land surface and host more than three-quarters of the terrestrial biodiversity. Unfortunately, their decline around the world over the years has been alarming. The Taita hills, for example, have lost approximately 98 per cent of their original montane cloud forests over the last 200 years due to land-use changes. Twelve forest fragments restricted to the highest peaks and steepest slopes currently remain, with their sizes ranging from one to 220 hectares.

The Taita hills cover an area of 35,000 ha in southern Kenya, 50 kilometres southeast of the world-famous Tsavo West National Park. Their forests hold a unique array of plants and animals, some found nowhere else on Earth. These forests form part of the Eastern Afromontane Biodiversity Hotspot. They are designated as a Key Biodiversity Area (KBA) and an Endemic Bird Area.

Working closely with local communities in the area, Nature Kenya is implementing a project that seeks to conserve and expand existing forest fragments in the Taita hills. This project, supported by the Darwin Initiative, also aims at safeguarding the unique biodiversity of Taita and improving water security for people.

Forest landscape restoration is one of the activities the project is undertaking. Sixty hectares of degraded forestland are targeted for restoration using two approaches.

One approach involves directly planting wild tree seeds in degraded areas. In the second method, indigenous tree seedlings

propagated in community nurseries are planted instead. Community members collect wild tree seeds for both.

Local people drawn from the Dawida Biodiversity Conservation Community-based Organization (DABICO) and five community forest associations (CFAs) are engaged in the restoration initiative. DABICO is the site support group for the Taita hills Forest KBA. The CFAs are from Ngangao, Susu-Ndiwenyi-Fururu, Iyale-Wesu-Mbili, Chawia and Vuria forests. Nature Kenya has facilitated training on wild tree seed collection and tree nursery establishment for the community members.

To date, 25 hectares of degraded forest areas have been restored with 34,000 indigenous tree seedlings from nine community tree nurseries. Areas restored include the Chawia, Iyale, Ngangao and Msidunyi forest segments.

"We are raising tree nurseries to restore degraded forest areas in Taita hills. We are also raising community awareness of the importance of forest restoration. It is good to see our communities embracing forest restoration," says John Maghanga, a member of DABICO.

Community members closely monitor the rehabilitated sites to ensure the survival of the planted trees.

Nature Kenya is also promoting on-farm tree planting to increase tree cover and boost community livelihoods in Taita under this project. More than 800 households within the project area have received 8,000 avocado and macadamia seedlings for on-farm planting. 🌱

## Remembering 'Mzee' David Charo Ngala

By Francis Kagema

The late Mzee David Charo Ngala's love affair with Arabuko-Sokoke Forest started in 1970 when he landed a casual job at the Gede Forest Station. A year later, Ngala was recruited by the then Forest Department (FD) as a nursery attendant. From then on, Ngala moved to different positions within the FD in Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, from nursery attendant to store attendant and finally to driver. As a driver, he had the opportunity to venture into the forest and its various stations.

Ngala's knowledge of Arabuko-Sokoke grew with time, cementing his fondness for the forest. In 1983, he started guiding researchers into the Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, as he was, at that time, the only person knowledgeable about it. These research expeditions exposed him to the scientific aspects of the forest. Ngala's interest in the birds, insects, reptiles, mammals and trees of Arabuko-Sokoke Forest kindled his appreciation of its biodiversity value. A key species he specialized in was the Sokoke Scops Owl.

Ngala guided many researchers in their studies of the Sokoke Scops Owl, including Munir Virani, who later became a raptor specialist. Other researchers he worked with were Leon Bennun, John Fanshawe, Paul Matiku (currently Executive Director of Nature Kenya) and Colin Jackson. The number of researchers and bird watchers visiting the forest grew following each round of research work and publications, attracting younger community members mentored by Ngala to join in and assist. They included Willy Kombe in 1992 and Jonathan Baya, Emmanuel Thoya and Bakari George in 1994. Others joined later including Albert Baya and Jonathan Mwachongo. These individuals developed into research assistants and bird guides of Arabuko-Sokoke Forest. These young guides would later undergo professional training and establish and register the Arabuko Sokoke Forest Guides Association in 1996. **Contd. in pg. 2**





## Remembering 'Mzee' David Charo Ngala *contd.*

In 1995, Arabuko-Sokoke Forest faced the threat of excision by the government around the Roka and Mpendala areas. Ngala responded to the threat by mobilizing communities to oppose the move. This action led to the formation of the Arabuko-Sokoke Forest Adjacent Dwellers Association (ASFADA). Community opposition to annexing the forest bore fruit, with ASFADA prevailing as a forest conservation lobby group.

ASFADA was instrumental in piloting Participatory Forest Management (PFM) from 1997 to 2002 in Dida, west of Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, Ngala's birthplace. The PFM pilot process culminated in the drafting of the Forests Act (2005), which formed the legal foundation for community participation in the management of forests in Kenya. Ngala contributed immensely to this process that led to the current forest conservation and management system.

Ngala worked for the government in Arabuko-Sokoke Forest for 37 years, retiring in 2007. His love and commitment to the forest transcended beyond his formal employment. With support from friends, Ngala continued working as a guide, research assistant and community mobilizer in Arabuko-Sokoke.

On several occasions, Ngala would camp at different locations in the forest, armed with a pair of binoculars, GPS, notebook and data sheets to gather information on happenings around the forest. Year in, year out, he would walk hundreds of kilometres in the forest each year to remove snares, record cut stems and observe tens of biodiversity parameters.

Ngala once said to me: "When I die in the forest, don't look for me." This statement best summarises his resolve to remain in Arabuko-Sokoke Forest his entire life. At that time it sounded awkward to me, but that was the real Ngala. He gave 52 years of his 70 years of life to the forest.

Though his age had advanced, he never showed signs of slowing down. Until his untimely demise through a motorcycle accident on 7th June 2022, Ngala was able to do three 1km transects in a day which is a herculean task for younger people. His illustrious life, exploits and commitment to the conservation of Arabuko-Sokoke Forest will remain unparalleled for a long time.

Fare thee well, Mzee Ngala.

## 2022 World Environment Day Summary

By Peter Kibobi

**On June 5th, we, and the world, marked World Environment Day. This year the event called for transformative changes to policies and choices to enable cleaner, greener, and sustainable living in harmony with nature under the #OnlyOneEarth campaign. Humans need to decide to live sustainably, in harmony with nature, by shifting to greener lifestyles and by making suitable policies and individual choices. "Only One Earth" was the motto of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm, Sweden, in 1972. Fifty years on, the motto is more pertinent than ever - planet Earth is our only home, and humanity must safeguard its finite resources.**

**The national celebrations took place in Nyeri county at the Dedan Kimathi University of Technology. Nature Kenya supported and took part in the event. Elsewhere, 16 site support groups (SSGs) affiliated with Nature Kenya, and other partners, held activities to mark the day. The SSGs were from Dakatcha Woodland, Taita hills, Kinangop grasslands, Yala and Dunga swamps, Tana River Delta, Maasai Mara, Mida Creek, Sabaki River estuary, Kikuyu escarpment, Mukurwe-ini valleys, Kakamega forest, Arabuko-Sokoke forest, Mount Kenya, North Nandi forest, Mumoni and Mutitu hilltops Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs).**

**Activities held by the SSGs during the day included clean-ups, tree planting, bird watching and environmental education and awareness creation, with 2,479 individuals, including school children, participating. Eight SSGs planted over 10,000 trees to mark the day.**



**Tree planting on World Environment Day to restore Arabuko-Sokoke Forest.**  
PHOTOS: CHARO NGUMBAAO

## The long road to COP 15: One step forward, two steps back?

By Georgina Chandler, RSPB

Despite negotiations stretching late into the night at the Convention on Biological Diversity meeting last week in Nairobi, a massive gap remains between what we need to secure a nature-positive world, and the inconclusive and woefully inadequate text currently on the table. To turn the ship around, we need to rally around this once-in-a-decade opportunity to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030.

Progress during this last round of negotiations before the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) COP15 has been painfully slow again. Countries have been negotiating a new global biodiversity framework which will set a global plan of action to save nature this decade.

Negotiations in Nairobi on the new global biodiversity framework have ended, leaving us with mixed emotions. First, elation and relief that we finally received dates for COP15 (Montreal, December 5th – 17th), a moment we can galvanize public and political momentum towards. Second, frustration and (personally) a lot of anger - the text and targets that we came to Nairobi with seems to have ballooned rather than shrunk with many discussions raking over old ground for the third time rather than building consensus for constructive and ambitious outcomes.

### Where was the urgency?

There was a real sense that we lacked collective drive and urgency in the room and many negotiators and civil society observers felt the same. As a result, the text (the draft of the new framework that will be shared as a result of the meeting) is limp and lacklustre. We have a mountain to climb before we can say we are close to a successful outcome. To quote one of the delegates: "congratulations to the whole group for being in the same place as Geneva, (where the last set of meetings were held) maybe even backwards". There were some small wins (see below), but if this is the ceiling of ambition for COP15 we are heading towards the most concerning outcome – a mediocre one.

### Where were the champions?

There is a gaping disconnect between the ambitious words that many leaders for nature have committed to over the past few years and the reality in the negotiating room. Clearly negotiators were not feeling the pressure to deliver results or even come to Nairobi with a mandate to negotiate. Where were the champions that many have worked so hard to secure? We certainly didn't hear them.

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## Where is the trust?

There are many bridges that need to be built and mended. Key cross-cutting issues such as national sovereignty, resource mobilisation, sustainable use (to name a few) crept into nearly every paragraph and target of the framework, preventing meaningful progress and obscuring any hope of crisp, measurable, ambitious text in Nairobi. The root of this is potentially low trust that these issues, which are crucial for many Parties, won't be honoured unless they are explicitly written into all the targets. The framework is also not being seen by many as the whole picture – each target is being looked at and negotiated in isolation and the interdependencies are being overlooked.

## Were there glimmers of progress?

Thankfully it wasn't all bad news. Despite the painfully slow pace, we did start to move in the right direction in some of the key targets:

**Goals for species recovery:** the draft framework includes a goal to tackle species extinctions, reduce extinction risk, and increase species population abundance. A particular priority for us is to ensure that this goal is SMART (specific, measurable, ambitious, realistic and time-bound). Despite lengthy and complex discussions, and disagreements over terminology, time scales, and numeric figures, several countries championed our asks, and the final text that emerged has all the key elements in it. The challenge now will be to ensure that the brackets around these key pieces are removed so that this goal remains strong, and we can hold countries accountable to it.

**The 2030 mission:** This 'mission' will serve to guide the direction of the whole framework, as an outcome statement for what we want to see by 2030. Unfortunately, countries didn't come to a consensus on one text, but encouragingly several of the options left on the table include reference to achieving a Nature Positive world, and

halting and reversing biodiversity loss by 2030. Again, the challenge now will be to build stronger support for these options, across regions, to ensure that the 2030 mission really can act as the guiding light for the decade.

## The way forward?

We are left with many questions and only five months to COP15. Yet, this is not the time to give up on the CBD. If anything, we should call out the outcome of Nairobi and channel our frustration into a concerted effort to genuinely turn the tide on biodiversity loss. There are clear things we need to do:

- Continue to raise the profile of the biodiversity crisis and the once-in-a-decade opportunity of COP15 at the highest political levels. With the dates now clear in calendars, moments such as the UN General Assembly can help us continue to build momentum towards the COP.
- Communicate to our members, supporters and the public what the opportunity is, and that failure is not an option. Call on the leaders for nature to demonstrate their commitment for an ambitious post-2020 framework.
- Work with negotiators and countries to build a sense of unity, urgency, and purpose. Use this time to convene and find solutions to sticky issues such as financing. We need to come to COP15 with many of these problems ironed out or we will continue to go around in circles.

We have a lot still to do – as is the theme for these negotiations – but this time we have the upcoming COP15 on the horizon to rally around and to use as a moment for public and political pressure. Something we need now more than ever to spur genuine action to save nature. 🐝

**Source:** <https://community.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/b/nature-s-advocates>

## Five planets across the pre-dawn sky

■ By Fleur Ng'weno

In the first week of July 2022, all five planets that can be seen with the unaided eye are in the pre-dawn sky. Golden Saturn rises during the evening, and is high in the west at dawn. Bright Jupiter rises near midnight, then earlier each night, and is high above us at dawn. Reddish Mars rises around 1 am and is high in the east at dawn.

Brilliant Venus is low in the east at dawn. Bright little Mercury is below Venus, sinking into the sunrise at mid-month. The waning moon seems to be near Saturn on July 15, very near Jupiter on the 19th, near Mars on July 21-22, and near Venus on the 26-27th.

Late in July, Mercury reappears in the evening sky, low over the sunset. The thin crescent moon is near Mercury on July 30.

## July Stars

Spica, a bright blue-white star, is high overhead in the evening. Below Spica in the south there are two brilliant stars, Alpha and Beta Centauri in the constellation of the Centaur. Alpha Centauri, the brightest, is actually composed of three stars. Two of these stars, Alpha Centauri A and Alpha Centauri B, are very close to each other; to us they appear as one. The third star in Alpha Centauri, a small, red star called Proxima Centauri, is 4.22 light years away – the nearest star to our sun.

North of Spica is the bright, orange star Arcturus, at the tip of a kite-shaped constellation, or star pattern, that the ancient Greeks called Boötes the Herdsman. Below Arcturus in

the north, is the Plough or Big Dipper – a line of three stars above a box formed by four stars.

East of Spica is Antares, the fiery red heart of the constellation of Scorpius the Scorpion. West of Antares, three bright stars form the scorpion's claws. South of Antares, a line of stars forms the scorpion's body, like a giant fishhook. Two stars close together are the sting in the scorpion's tail.

Low in the western sky, the constellation of Leo the Lion is setting; in the southwest, the Southern Cross is tilting towards the west. The waxing moon seems near Regulus in Leo on July 3, near Spica on the 7th and near Antares on the 10th.

## Moon, July '22

First quarter (half-lit at sunset), July 7. Full moon – a 'supermoon', a little closer and brighter than usual – July 13. Last quarter (half-lit at sunrise), July 20. New moon, July 28.

## Meteor showers

Each year the Earth passes through areas containing dust from old comets. When bits of dust or rock fall into the Earth's atmosphere, they burn up, creating a trail of light. These are meteors, also called "shooting stars" or "burning spears". The Southern Delta Aquarids meteor shower takes place from mid-July to mid-August. Best viewing days likely to be before dawn on July 28-29-30. Best viewing is from a dark location after midnight – and with a clear sky! 🌠

## Stingless but defensive

■ By Kathrin Krausa and Matilda Gikonyo

As their name reveals, stingless bees do not sting. But not being able to sting does not make them defenceless. The defence strategies of stingless bees consist of several components that ensure an effective defence of the queen, her brood and the stores.

First: the nest. Stingless bees choose very protected places to build a nest. These could be crevices in rocks, hollowed tree trunks or underground cavities that cannot be found and opened easily. Nests can be accessed only through a single narrow entrance tube that is easy to protect. This leads to the second component: guards.

As seen in the picture, guarding bees line up in the nest entrance tube and discriminate between friend and foe. The entrance is open for nestmates that frequently pass with collected pollen and nectar. A non-nestmate, however, is not welcomed and the bees might attack or retreat. In case of an attack, guards fly out of the nest, hover in front of the entrance and bite the intruder. Along with the bite they set free an alarm pheromone that recruits further bees to join in the defence. Guards might also carry sticky



**Hypotrigena guards defending the entrance tube of their nest.**

PHOTO: KATHRIN KRAUSA

resin on their hind legs which can either be applied directly to the intruder to immobilize it or be used to quickly close the nest entrance. In the latter case, the bees simply retreat to the nest and wait until the danger is over.

Despite the various defence strategies, most species are very calm and super harmless to humans. That is why it is so great to work with them! You would never swell or experience the pain honeybee venom causes. 🐝



## Wednesday Morning Birdwalks in Nairobi

Please observe Covid-19 protocols as needed: wear or bring masks and meet at designated venues.

**6th July, 2022 – Museum Grounds/Michuki Memorial Park.** Meet at 8 am in the open space in front of the entrance to the museum galleries.

**13th July, 2022 – Karura Forest.** Meet at the Limuru Road entrance, Gate A, at 8:30am. We will then proceed to Amani parking. Thanks to Friends of Karura Forest for welcoming the birdwalk.

**20th July, 2022 – Karen Blixen Museum.** Meet at 8.30am in the Museum's Car Park area. Directions: Coming from the city centre, take Ngong Road towards Karen. Turn left at Shell Petrol Station onto Karen Road. The Museum is about 1.5Kms after Karen Country Club.

**27th July, 2022 – Paradise Lost.** Meet at Paradise Lost Main Gate at 8:30 am. Directions: Turn Left at Paradise Lost junction in Thindigua after Runda Greens before Quick Mart Supermarket along Kiambu Road. Turn right at Kencom Apartments just after Kasarini Primary School. It's about 500m to the main gate. Thanks to the management for welcoming the birdwalk.

## Sunday Birdwatch

**17th July. Sunday Bird Watch – Ondiri Swamp, Kikuyu.** Meet at 8:30am at the Ondiri Wetland Information Centre. Directions: Coming from the city centre, take Waiyaki Way towards Kikuyu. Turn left at Gitaru onto Southern Bypass. Slip left onto Kikuyu overpass. Take first left turn at overpass and drive straight to the Information Centre. Ondiri Swamp is the only quaking bog in Kenya, a presumed source of the Nairobi River. If you have questions, please write to [news@naturekenya.org](mailto:news@naturekenya.org) or phone 0780-149200.

**Bird Ringing at Nairobi National Museum grounds** usually take place on Tuesday mornings. Please confirm with Titus Imboma on [Imbomati911@gmail.com](mailto:Imbomati911@gmail.com) or Phone 0721-649452.

## Thursday Birdwalks in Malindi

**7th July, 2022 – White Elephant Resort Garden.** Meet at 4:00pm at the Museum near Nature Kenya Membership Office.

**14th July, 2022 – Moi Village and bridge.** Meet at 4:00pm at the Museum near Nature Kenya Membership Office.

**21st July, 2022 – Muyeye.** Meet at 4:00pm at the Museum near Nature Kenya Membership Office.

## Tree Walk By Nature Kenya Plants Committee

**Venue: National Museums of Kenya  
Meet at Nairobi Museum main gate  
Date: Friday 29th July Time: 9:00 AM  
Contact: 0780 149200 or 0726 006283**

**28th July, 2022 – Mtangani via Afya Hospital.** Meet at 4:00pm at the Museum near Nature Kenya Membership Office.

**30th July. Saturday Bird Watch - Sabaki River estuary.** Meet at the Malindi Museum at 7:00am (what to bring; - Drinking water, 100/= for transport by tuktuk).

For more information, contact Amina Simba at [malindimembers@naturekenya.org](mailto:malindimembers@naturekenya.org) or [aminasimba6@gmail.com](mailto:aminasimba6@gmail.com) or phone: 0725 223042.

**Mombasa Birdwalks** are held the 3rd Saturday of each month. To check meeting time and place, check Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/FFJmombasa/>

Or contact: Taibali Hamzali <[thamzali@gmail.com](mailto:thamzali@gmail.com)> / 0733-980540 or Kelvin Mazera <[klvnrua@yahoo.com](mailto:klvnrua@yahoo.com)> / 0720-928783

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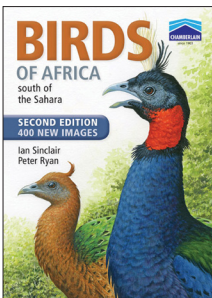
**Kenya Bird Map** <<http://kenya.birdmap.africa/>>

If you have questions re KBM, write to <[kenyabirdmap@naturekenya.org](mailto:kenyabirdmap@naturekenya.org)>

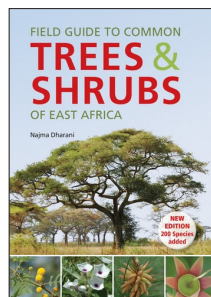
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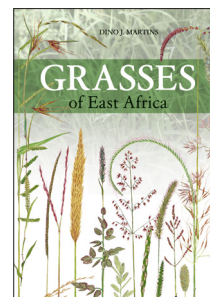
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For details on associated groups such as Youth Committee, Succulenta, and Friends of Nairobi Arboretum, City Park or Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, contact [office@naturekenya.org](mailto:office@naturekenya.org)