



Members of Iyale Angamiza Jangwa Seedling Group at a forest restoration site in Taita hills.
Photo by Caroline Chebet

Women for conservation of Taita Hills forests

■ By Gilbay Obunga

Communities in rural areas mostly rely on natural resources for their daily needs. Over-reliance on natural resources such as wood for fuel has led to the destruction of habitats such as forests. Women, who often have to spend much of their time and energy looking for firewood and water, are the most affected by forest degradation. As such, their direct interaction with forests for firewood, fodder and other products has offered them the necessary knowledge and skills to wisely utilize these resources to meet their basic needs.

In Taita Hills, women have organized themselves into groups to conserve and manage the relic Taita Hills cloud forests. One such group is the Iyale Angamiza Jangwa Seedling Group. This group was founded in 2009 to mobilize women to support the conservation and management of Iyale, Wesu, and Mbili forest fragments. Currently, the group has 16 members engaged in growing indigenous trees, among other activities.

"We started restoring forests because our indigenous trees were disappearing after

being replaced by exotic ones, which affected our water supply. This is why we came together as women and started planting indigenous trees that are our heritage and make our environment better," says Honorina Wache, the group's secretary.

Through support from the Darwin Initiative, the group has restored 16.1 ha by planting 20,068 assorted indigenous tree species

(sourced from their tree nursery) in the degraded and fire-damaged areas of the Iyale forest. To ensure high survival rates of the planted seedlings, the group undertakes spot weeding and replanting at restoration sites.

"By conserving forests in Taita we are also conserving our threatened birds like the Taita Apalis and Taita Thrush," she adds. The Taita Apalis and Taita Thrush are only found in Taita Hills forests.

The group is also promoting beekeeping to empower its members to support nature conservation. On this front, the group has received 60 Langstroth beehives and bee suits purchased by Nature Kenya with funding from the Darwin Initiative and People Partner with Nature projects. The hives have been distributed to members across the Taita landscape.

"When we conserve our forests, we get clean air, good rains, pasture and bees also get food. Bees give us honey and other products," says Honorina.

Members of the group have received training in apiculture and value addition to make the most out of beekeeping. In addition to producing honey, the group makes a beeswax-based body cream called *Kilambo Soft*. *Kilambo* is a Taita word meaning 'something'. This locally-produced body cream softens and moisturizes skin and is also used to treat athlete's foot and skin rashes. Honorina attended the 2023 Nairobi International Trade Fair, where she marketed *Kilambo Soft* and other wax products from Taita Hills. Her appearance at the trade fair helped to open up new markets for the body cream that was an attraction at the Nature Kenya stand. 🐝



Jars of Kilambo Soft beeswax body cream. Photo by Gilbay Obunga



ACTION



KBA in Focus: Mumoni Hill Forest Reserve

By Joshua Sese

Mumoni Hill Forest Reserve Key Biodiversity Area (KBA), is a species-rich dryland hilltop ecosystem emerging as an inselberg from arid scrubland vegetation on plains 600m -1800m above sea level. It is located in Mumoni sub-county of the vast Kitui County. The KBA is characterized by scrublands and wooded bushland on the lowlands and an upland dry forest ecosystem dominated by *Drypetes*, *Combretum*, *Vepris* and *Croton* species on the hilltop. Perennial springs that sustain human and animal water needs occur there. The forest reserve is surrounded by a constantly growing human population that practices small-scale agriculture.

Mumoni KBA is well endowed with biodiversity. It is home to Hinde's Babbler (*Turdoides hindei*), a Kenyan endemic bird species listed in the IUCN Red List as Vulnerable (VU), the endangered (EN) Martial and Crowned eagles, and Afro and Palearctic migratory birds. It hosts a large plant diversity of more than 350 species, including dryland endemics restricted to the East African floral region, 24 mammal species, and 17 species of reptiles and amphibians. The pancake tortoise (*Malacochersus tornieri*), listed in Appendix II of CITES, and the Taita toad (*Bufo taitanus*), previously only known to occur in Taita Hills, have also been recorded in the KBA.

However, the KBA faces threats which include encroachment, illegal harvesting of timber and firewood, charcoal burning, over-harvesting of medicinal plants such as *Warburgia ugandensis* and *Pittosporum viridiflorum*, overgrazing, and poor agricultural activities like slash and burn which often causes forest fires.

Mumoni Site Support Group (SSG) is a local community group at the forefront of conserving, protecting and restoring biodiversity in the Mumoni Hill Forest Reserve KBA. The group was officially registered in 2016 with the aim of promoting environmental conservation at the KBA. It participates in activities such as beekeeping, tree seedling production and planting, and awareness creation through market and school outreaches and chief's *barazas* to sensitize and educate the public on environmental conservation. The SSG also undertakes biodiversity monitoring and actively participates in international days such as World Desertification and Drought Day, among others. 🌱

Striding forward to provide modern information services

By Vivienne Nandokha

The role of the information keeper has been evolving since the stone tablets and scrolls days, to when book printing started and to the modern digital era. To keep up with emerging trends, the Joint East Africa Natural History Society (EANHS) - National Museums of Kenya (NMK) Library embarked on a digitization process to enhance public access to information and service delivery. Nature Kenya has been very supportive of this cause. In 2022 Nature Kenya donated eight computers to the library. Last month they gave the library a large-screen digital TV, LCD projector, multifunctional photocopier/scanner/printer and laminating machine. With these resources, the Joint Library keeps moving forward to provide a modern information service.

In many forums, the Joint Library has been proposed as a training centre for digital skills improvement for NMK staff. This will significantly enable NMK to play its part in the government's digitization agenda to improve the efficient delivery of government services to all citizens.

The Joint NMK and Nature Kenya (NK) Library has also made some commendable strides from the localized digital provision of information through the library software catalogue package CDS-ISIS to the online provision of

information through the Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) software, KOHA at <https://library.museums.or.ke>.

This is one of the services that enabled NMK to move from a rating of 46 per cent to 87.5 per cent in a baseline survey conducted to assess NMK's digitalization preparedness.

Another crucial development in relation to the equipment that Nature Kenya has purchased for the Joint Library is the development of an institutional information repository (IR). This is a significant step for NMK as it is one of the matrices used to rank research/academic institutions. The Joint Library has also restored the book snap digitization equipment (also purchased several years ago by Nature Kenya). With the dedicated time and efforts of two volunteers, the library is customizing the DSpace software used in the book snap digitization equipment to suit not only NMK's needs but also those of Nature Kenya.

The establishment of a digital repository at the Joint Library seeks to attract more partnerships, collate the work of NMK and Nature Kenya in one place, contribute to building intellectual leadership and credibility and preserve documented research, among other benefits. This is expected to increase the global visibility of both NMK and Nature Kenya. 🌐



Dr. Fredrick Manthi, NMK's Director Antiquities, Sites and Monuments (right) receives a LCD projector from Nature Kenya Executive Director Dr. Paul Matiku. The projector was among equipment donated to the Joint NMK/EANHS Library by Nature Kenya. Photo by John Mwacharo

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EDITORIAL TEAM

Fleur Ng'weno, Angela Mecha,
Richard Kipngeno and John
Mwacharo

LAYOUT

John Mwacharo

FRONT BANNER

Simon Odhiambo



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Post: P. O. Box 44486 GPO, Nairobi

Telephone: 020 3537568/0780149200/ 0771343138

Email: office@naturekenya.org

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October Big Day Summary



October Big Day participants at Giraffe Centre, Nairobi (top and middle), a Black-winged Stilt and Klaas's Cuckoo seen on that day at Lake Elmenteita and Soysambu Wildlife Conservancy. Photos by Daniel Mutua and Aloise Garvey

Birdwatchers in Kenya joined the rest of the world in participating in eBird's October Big Day on October 14. On this day, birders around the world go out to enjoy birds and submit their observations through the eBird mobile app. The day is also celebrated as the World Migratory Bird Day.

Nine Site Support Groups (SSGs) affiliated to Nature Kenya took part in the event in Lake Elmenteita,

Ruma NP, Dakatcha Woodland, Tana River Delta, Sabaki Estuary, Lake Bogoria, Mumoni Hill, Lake Ol'Bolossat, Mount Kenya and Yala Swamp Key Biodiversity Areas.

Kenya was ranked 9th in the world with 706 species and 227 checklists completed. Top Kenyan eBirders were Bruce Hillier and Bertina K, with 169 species in Nairobi National Park. The country's top hotspot was Lewa Wildlife Conservancy with 201 species. 🦋

Jupiter in evening, Venus in morning

By Fleur Ng'weno

The planet Jupiter is the bright steady light in the eastern sky in the evening. During the night, it appears to travel across the sky with the stars, setting before sunrise. (Actually, it's the Earth that spins towards the east.) With binoculars on a clear, dark night, you can see four of Jupiter's moons around the planet.

The planet Venus is the bright steady light in the eastern sky in the **morning**. The waning crescent moon appears near Venus on November 9 and 10.

The planet Saturn is like a bright star, high overhead in the evening. The small but bright planet Mercury rises above the sunset from mid-month, seeming close to the reddish star Antares. A sliver of crescent moon appears near Mercury and Antares on November 14; the waxing moon then seems near Saturn on the 20th, near Jupiter on the 24th and 25th.

November stars

The bright star Fomalhaut is high in the south, below Saturn. The very bright star Achernar is below Fomalhaut. Below Achernar on a clear, dark night, you may see two rounded, pale, cloud-like areas: the Small and Large Magellanic Clouds. These are small galaxies, composed of millions of stars.

High overhead, four stars form the corners of the Great Square of Pegasus, the flying horse of the ancient Greeks. Low in the northeast, the constellation Cassiopeia is a group of bright stars in the shape of a letter "M". Look for a hazy, blurry spot of light between these two constellations. This is the Great Spiral Nebula M31 in the constellation of Andromeda – also a galaxy of stars.

In the west, the waxing crescent moon seems close to the star Nunki, part of the "teapot" or "basket" shape in the constellation Sagittarius, on Nov.17.

The Pleiades or Seven Sisters – a cluster of bright stars close together – are rising in the east. Below the Pleiades, a group of stars form a cone-like shape, the Hyades cluster, in the constellation of Taurus the Bull. The bright, reddish star Aldebaran is at one end of the cone. The almost full moon is near the Pleiades on Nov.26.

In the morning sky, Sirius, the brightest star we can see at night, is high in the southwest, almost overhead, at dawn. Canopus, the second brightest star, is below, in the south. The constellation Orion the Hunter is high in the west.

Moon Nov 2023

Diwali, the Hindu festival of lights, on November 12 ushers in the new moon on the 13th. Look for the thin crescent moon near planet Mercury and the red star Antares on the 14th. Nov. 4, Last quarter (half-lit moon at sunrise). Nov 20, First quarter (half-lit moon at sunset). Nov 27, Full moon, rising in the east.

Leonids Meteor Shower

In its orbit around the sun, the Earth regularly passes through areas of dust and debris. When a bit of dust or rock falls into the Earth's atmosphere, it burns up, creating a bright light. This is called a meteor or "shooting star", or, in parts of Kenya, "burning spear". The Leonids Meteor shower lasts from November 6 to 30, with the peak between midnight November 17 and dawn on the 18th. You need a clear, dark sky, away from city lights, to see most meteors.

Birding Updates

Wednesday Morning Bird walks in Nairobi. In case of heavy rain on any Wednesday morning, we will meet at the Nature Kenya membership office and perhaps visit the Bird Gallery of the Museum. Bring your membership card, in hard or soft copy.

1st November – City Park. Meet at 8.30 am at the parking near the Coca Cola Kiosk. Directions: Coming from the City centre, take Limuru Road past Aga Khan Hospital. Make a U-turn at Total Energies Petrol Station, Limuru Road. Drive back along Limuru Road and turn left onto City Park Road next to City Park Market.

8th November – Giraffe Centre. Meet at 8.30 am at the Giraffe Centre main entrance. Thanks to AFEW for welcoming the bird walk.

15th October – Museum Grounds/ Michuki Memorial Park. Meet at 8:00 am in the open space in front of the entrance to the museum galleries.

22nd November – Ngong Road Forest Sanctuary. Meet at 8:30 am at the Main Gate. (There's a Sanctuary fee of Ksh. 100 for citizens) Directions: Coming from the city centre, take Ngong Road towards Karen. After Jamhuri Sports Ground take the first left turn (before the Commonwealth Cemetery). It's 500m to the Sanctuary main gate.

29th November – Paradise Lost. Meet at Paradise Lost Main Gate at 8:30 am. Directions: Take Kiambu Road. Turn Left at Paradise Lost junction in Thindigua after Runda Greens before Quick Mart Supermarket. 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 bird walk.

19th November. Sunday Birdwatch – Kapiti Plains. Meet at 8:30 am at the ILRI Kapiti Research Station Gate on Mombasa road. Directions: Coming from the city centre, take Mombasa Road. Pass the Makutano/Kyumvi junction to Machakos and continue towards Mombasa. After 9 km there is a green sign on left "Kapiti Plains". Turn right to the gate and barrier with the sign "ILRI Kapiti Research Station".

Matatus to Sultan Hamud and Emali will stop at "Kapiti stage". Better still is to hire a Machakos matatu for all those coming by public transport.

This is a day trip; bring a packed lunch and water. There are ticks on Kapiti Plains, but they are not known to carry diseases.

If you have questions, please write < news@naturekenya.org > or phone 0780-149200.

Bird Ringing at Nairobi National Museum grounds usually takes place once a week, usually on Tuesdays. Please confirm with Titus Imboma <imbomati911@gmail.com> Phone 0721-649452.

Thursday Birdwalks in Malindi

2nd November – Malindi Harbor. Meet at 4:00 pm at the Malindi Museum near Nature Kenya Membership Office.

9th November – Mayungu. Meet at 4:00 pm at the Malindi Museum near Nature Kenya Membership Office.

16th November 2023 – Mtangani via Afya Hospital. Meet at 4:00 pm at Malindi Museum Nature Kenya Membership Office.

23rd November 2023 – Camp Gedeng'. Meet at 3:30 pm at Malindi Museum near the Nature Kenya Membership office (from Malindi, Camp Gedeng' is on the right before crossing River Sabaki bridge).

30th November 2023 – Malindi Marine Park. Meet at 4:00 pm at Malindi Marine Park Gate (From Malindi BP stage to the Marine park is 100/= one way by Boda).

25th November. Saturday Birdwatch – Sabaki River Estuary. Meet at 7:00 am at Malindi Museum near Nature Kenya Office. The bird walk is likely to last about 3 hours. Bring drinking water.

For more information, email: <malindimembers@naturekenya.org > 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> / 0733-980540 or Kelvin Mazera <klvnrua@yahoo.com> / 0720-928783

Tree Walk By Nature Kenya Plants Committee

**Venue: National Museums of Kenya
Meet at Nairobi Museum main gate**

Date: Friday 24th Nov Time: 9:00 AM

Contact: 0780 149200 or 0726 006283



White Jacaranda (*Jacaranda mimosifolia alba*) in bloom at City Park. The tree blooms once a year in Oct-Nov.
Photo by Benard Koros

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Schools, Clubs	1,500
Corporates	50,000 and above



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For details on associated groups such as Youth Committee, Succulenta, Mammal Committee and Friends of Nairobi Arboretum or City Park, contact **office@naturekenya.org**