ABCP NEWSLETTER

Red Rock, Texas **African Blackwood Conservation Project** **Annual Report No. 2—July, 1999**

Project Status

It has been two years since the last newsletter was mailed in July, 1997, and we offer our apologies to our early contributors for skipping 1998. Several factors entered into the decision to delay the newsletter.

The weather in Tanzania was severely impacted by the El Niño weather phenomenon, as it was in many other parts of the world. In the last half of 1997, Tanzania suffered a period of drought. Then in the winter and spring of 1998, severe flooding occurred. Mr. Chuwa was, in fact, trapped by flood waters and had to wait several weeks for the water to recede before he could make his way back home from his botanical work in the countryside.

Sebastian Chuwa sorting mpingo seeds

As a result, progress on the ABCP was somewhat delayed. Sebastian potted more seedlings in the winter of 1997-98 but could do no further work on readying the one-acre Moshi Mpingo Plot because of the rains and floods. Finally, in late 1998, he was able to make major progress on the Moshi plot.

Barbed-wire fences have now been built and potted seedlings planted 15 months earlier in the fall of 1997 were transported to the site and replanted. So now the one-acre site which will serve as the home base and model for much of our future work has now been established.

In addition it was decided that since fundraising proceeds from the 1997 newsletter had been modest, time would be allocated to finding alternate means of support. One such effort was promoting the ABCP website, and several substantial contributions came from this outreach effort. Also a limited appeal was sent to a small mailing list supplied by Sebastian. These were names of US citizens Sebastian Chuwa has guided on the wildlife safaris he conducts in northern Tanzania. These efforts attracted several significant contributions to the project.

As a result, sufficient funding has been sent to Sebastian to maintain the project and begin a substantial replanting effort, finding permanent locations for the African blackwood seedlings which were first sprouted in 1997. The following sections will bring the project up to date, along with a brief history and recapitulation of its early activities.

"My 200 Mpingo seedlings are obviously not enough to make much difference compared with what is being lost. But next year I hope to have 20,000 seedlings to plant. It is vital for me to act now rather than wait until the future when things have reached a crisis..."
Sebastian Chuwa, "The Tree of Music", 1992

MISSION STATEMENT

The objectives of the African Blackwood Conservation Project are:

1) To replenish stands of African Blackwood in Tanzania that are being lost due to commercial exploitation and natural degradation. Mpingo seedlings will be raised in a sheltered environment until they are hardy enough to withstand fire and drought and can be replanted into the wild. The goal is to raise 20,000 mpingo seedlings a year.

2) To educate Tanzanians about the ecological and commercial importance of mpingo with the aim of enlisting volunteer assistance in conservation efforts for the tree.

3) To influence individual Tanzanian citizens to raise mpingo on private and public lands. This could become a viable source of income for future generations and help raise the economic standard of the areas where it is planted.

4) To conduct research studies at selected pilot project sites beginning with the Moshi Mpingo Plot & Nursery which will attempt to:

a) ascertain the feasibility of raising mpingo in a managed care situation,

b) and discover the best methods of propagation, care and distribution.

5) To document the results of these studies in published reports which will present a model for future conservation efforts for this species.

Background

In 1996 the first ABCP nursery was started in a fenced field donated to the work by a friend of Sebastian's. A nursery

attendant was hired and trained in the proper care of mpingo. Several thousand seedlings were planted over the next two years and successively repotted into larger containers as they grew.

The fall of 1998 marked the beginning of work on another piece of land, a one acre plot donated to the project by the village of Moshi, called the ABCP Moshi Mpingo Plot. It was fenced and cleared as needed to allow transplanting the first group of mpingo saplings in shallow irrigation channels which were dug to capture Tanzania's seasonal rains. The intent for this piece of land is to serve both as an experimental research project and nursery for raising trees. Here blackwood is being interplanted with a few other species to emulate a natural woodland environment. Observations will be conducted about growth and regeneration and conclusions will be gathered about the feasibility of raising mpingo in a planned and cultivated environment, something which has never been attempted on a large scale.

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." Margaret Mead

Mpingo Clubs

Sebastian and his wife Elizabeth, who is a teacher in Moshi, are greatly respected in the Moshi/Arusha area. Their lifelong commitment to conservation has inspired them to establish 31 youth clubs in the schools of the area

The Chuwa's have developed a successful method of attracting young people into their clubs by establishing programs in 3 different areas. 1) They offer athletic activities — soccer and volleyball, 2) they teach the principles of conservation and plant identification, and 3) they offer practical training by showing each club how to start and maintain a tree nursery, seeding plants indigenous to their particular area and eventually transferring them back into a natural habitat. The clubs they have organized average 300 members each. Since the founding of the ABCP Sebastian has begun to organize Mpingo Clubs which focus specifically on the care and conservation of mpingo. These clubs are not only helping Sebastian with work started by the ABCP, but each has started its own mpingo nursery, thereby augmenting the outreach of the project.

7-day old mpingo plants at Moshi Nursery

Replanting

In the winter rainy season of late 1998 to early 1999, work began on transplanting the mature mpingo seedlings raised in the nursery. Dozens of Moshi residents have planted the young trees in their yards and several farmers in the area have established them in rows along field boundaries. Members of Mpingo Clubs are helping with transplanting seedlings into the Moshi Mpingo Plot. Sebastian is teaching them the most advantageous locations for mpingo to survive in a wild habitat. This is dependent on soil and moisture, competition from other vegetation and safety from grazing animals. South of Moshi and Arusha is one such location, an area of dry stream beds; here his young helpers are replanting many hundreds of seedlings.

It must be noted at this point, that all of the requests, plus several other goals, from Sebastian's wish list in the first (1996) fundraiser have been fulfilled. The ABCP now has a working nursery, a one-acre plot of saplings and has replanted thousands of mpingo back into their ecological niche in the African ecosystem. Sebastian is

Background & History of the ABCP

The purpose of the African Blackwood Conservation Project (ABCP) is to develop a grass-roots, direct action program to insure the long term survival of the African Blackwood, or mpingo tree. Since there have been few studies of either mpingo dispersal or its range of exploitation, government and regulatory agencies have hesitated to regulate its use. However, based on present consumption, projections estimate that in Tanzania most of the mature trees will be depleted within 20 years.

African Blackwood is used in several major ways: by the music industry for woodwind instruments—clarinets, flutes, oboes and bagpipes, by the Makonde, a group of indigenous African woodcarvers, by western woodworkers who practice a lathe technique called Ornamental Turning, for specialized woodworking functions such as knife handles and for subsistence needs within Tanzania.

Mr. Sebastian Chuwa is a Tanzanian botanist who has spent 25 years studying the wildlife of Africa. He is alarmed not only at the high rate of mpingo removal but also at its growing inability to establish young and viable trees in the wild to replace those which are being harvested. Habitat loss from increased population pressures, uncontrolled agricultural burning and increasing cycles of drought have all contributed to the demise of a young mpingo population.

In 1996 Mr. Chuwa and Mr. James Harris, an Ornamental Turner from Texas, started the ABCP. The intent was simple: Mr. Harris would raise money among the woodworkers and instrument makers of the western world and send it to Mr. Chuwa to start a nursery to raise mpingo seedlings. These would be nurtured until they were of sufficient age to withstand fire and drought damage. Then they would be replanted into the wild. Mr. Chuwa has raised over 100,000 seedlings of mixed species in the past decade. In addition he has begun educational programs to teach his countrymen about the value of the tree to influence both its conservation and replanting. His mpingo youth clubs have already planted thousands of trees.

All of the donated funds raised by the ABCP are sent directly to Mr. Chuwa. Mr. Harris donates his time, as well as the printing and postage costs for the fundraising campaign.

very proud of the project, committed to its continuation and has a long-range plan for its success.

Phase II — Education

One major factor that has delayed commercial and private efforts to replant mpingo is that it takes 70-200 years in

Building the fence at the Moshi Mpingo Plot after the El Niño rains had flooded the area

the wild to reach harvestable size. In order for the ABCP to have a lasting long-range impact it will necessarily have to provide information to the coming generations about the value of mpingo and the proper methods of replenishing its numbers. Consequently Phase II of the mpingo project will be educational.

The ABCP is now soliciting funds for a video camera, 2 VCR's and a TV for Sebastian. Two VCR's will give him a rudimentary capability of editing and copying videos. With this equipment he will be able to make educational and training films about mpingo. These will teach plant recognition, how to collect, sort and germinate seeds, how to prepare a seedbed and care for seedlings, how to choose the best habitat for replanting,

> ***We can do no great things—Only small things with great love.*** **–Mother Teresa**

as well as general instruction on the principles of conservation.

Sebastian's brother – Joachim – has experience in filmmaking and will assist in this part of the project. Sebastian himself will take footage during his various work-related projects. These videos will be shown to both school children and groups of interested adults.

Through these educational efforts we hope to achieve several objectives: 1) to raise awareness among Tanzanian citizens about the economic and ecological importance of mpingo so that it will not be needlessly harvested, 2) to enlist an increasing number of local people to help in the replanting effort, 3) to establish additional Mpingo Clubs, 4) to inspire other towns in the area to start mirror projects like the Moshi Mpingo Plot, 5) to provide a documented body of knowledge which will be offered to other groups wishing to duplicate the programs of the ABCP, and 6) to attract attention to the effort so that support can be solicited from major conservation funding organizations.

Other activities being taken by the ABCP at this time are a grant–writing campaign and efforts to expand our range of contacts — sending information and

Unloading mpingo seedlings ready to transplant into the Moshi Mpingo Plot

literature to major environmental and non-governmental agencies.

The ABCP has also been introducing Sebastian to various conservation organizations, some of which offer grants and prizes to conservationists in recognition of their efforts. Since he is little known outside his country, most individuals and groups in the conservation community are uninformed about his accomplishments. Few are aware, for instance, of his pioneer efforts in tracking and monitoring the black rhinos at Ngorongoro Crater which has led to their successful protection from poachers and kept this small remaining population intact. The ABCP hopes by such means to better publicize and support the service of this outstanding conservationist with whom

15-month old mpingo saplings ready to transport to the Moshi Mpingo Plot for plant-

it is our great privilege to work.

In His Own Words

The following information is from an email received from Sebastian Chuwa in mid-February, 1999, "...Some money I'm using is from my own pocket. I gave somebody a temporary job looking after our Mpingo plot and watering be-

> **If your plans are for one year, grow paddy.**
> **If your plans are for ten years, grow trees.**
> **If your plans are for fifty years, educate people.**

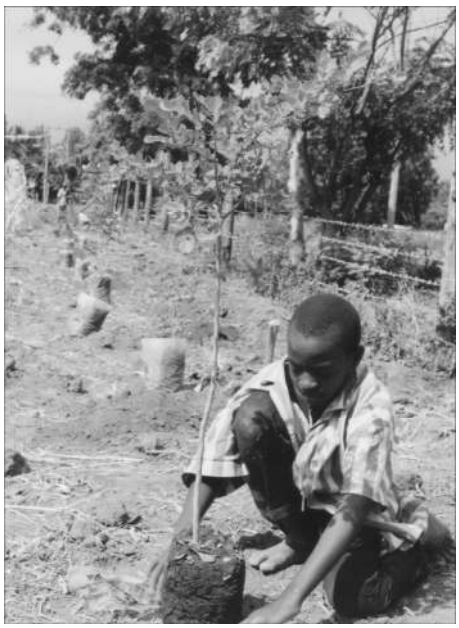
cause I planted them with the expectations of short rains in Dec/Jan, which never happened. The worker will water and do other work on the plot. Along the fence I planted some bushy trees called Dovyalis, a wild bush with long thorns and very good fruit which can be used for making jam. The poles we can buy here only last for ten years. The

Sebastian transplanting mpingo saplings

Dovyalis cuttings planted under the fence will grow into a brushy barrier in time

Dovyalis will grow up around the wires and make a permanent fence.

The rest of the seedlings we are going to plant around schools and farms. I have a lot of requests from individuals for planting around their farm boundary. I have listed 46 people who want Mpingo seedlings and I asked them to wait for a few weeks until the rains start. I have already talked to some local teachers about establishing Mpingo Clubs in their schools and the pupils are looking forward to that. I found it is very important to inform people, especially the youth, before we start moving the trees to the wild because there are a lot of Mpingo enemies like fire and cattle, which harm the young trees. I'm going to raise more seedlings, especially for replanting in the wild and will use youth groups for planting as part of an environmental conservation project and to preserve Mpingo for the future. If I get more funds I will start an education program."



Young member of one of Sebastian's Mpingo Clubs transplanting mpingo sapling

A UniMog for Sebastian

In 1997, a group of people in California who have organized themselves into a non-profit organization which they call the Rafiki Foundation (*Rafiki* means *friend* in Ki-Swahili) secured the donation of a 1966 UniMog which they shipped to Sebastian. This truck made by Mercedes Benz is a four-wheel drive army transport vehicle and the group filled it with school supplies, used computers and other supplies that could be used in Sebastian's botanical, educational and conservation work.

Sebastian driving the Unimog filled with children who are watching the lions of the Ngorongoro Crater National Park

The Rafiki Foundation is composed of members who have met Sebastian during safari or visits to Tanzania and been impressed with his efforts to serve in the fields of conservation and education. They also provide educational supplies for him to distribute to the youth in his area.

Sebastian will use the truck to carry materials, supplies and plants needed in his conservation efforts. He also plans to load up the truck with school children and drive them to the national parks and game preserves of northern Tanzania to show them the wealth of wildlife and natural beauty that will be both their heritage and also their responsibility to preserve for future generations.

This educational outreach on his part is invaluable for the future prospects of resources such as mpingo. Because of the material poverty of the country of Tanzania, many of the children Sebastian is mentoring would otherwise never be able to afford an experience in nature such as he is providing for them.

"In the Lion's Den"

In addition to being a botanist, Sebastian is also well known in northern Tanzania as a marvelous and informative safari guide. In 1996 a BBC film crew traveled to Tanzania to produce footage for a PBS *Nature* series program called "In the Lion's Den." Anthony Hopkins narrated the documentary inspired by his own life-long fascination with cats. Sebastian was a safari leader in the production of the documentary. He chose location sites and also acted as liaison between the filmmakers and the Maasai who were interviewed in the film about their tribal interactions with the lions of the Serengeti Plain.

Mpingo saplings have been transplanted into irrigation trenches along the fenceline at the Moshi Mpingo Plot in Dec. 1998

ABCP Organization News

On April 29, 1999, the ABCP received its charter as a non-profit corporation from the state of Texas. An application is now under consideration by the Internal Revenue Service to grant the ABCP IRS 501(c)3 tax-exempt status. After this legal determination is established, all contributions to the ABCP will be tax -deductible. Additionally, after such status is secured, the ABCP will begin to pursue grants from foundations for which the IRS tax-exempt non-profit status is a prerequisite for application.

In Memoriam – Roger Davies (1924-1998)

We note with regret the passing this past year of Roger Davies, past editor of the Society of Ornamental Turners Bulletin. As a master craftsman and mechanic whom I and my fellow ornamental turners held in the highest esteem, Roger appreciated that there was more to the craft of ornamental turning than just the mechanical manipulation of wood by tools. He had the vision to realize that there was also an aspect of responsibility for the materials that made such exquisite work as he practiced possible. He supported the replanting of mpingo trees by the African Blackwood Conservation Project both by his words through his editorial position with the Bulletin and with his pocketbook. His presence among us as a master craftsman and expert on the machinery of ornamental turning, as well as an outspoken advocate for blackwood conservation will indeed be missed. I knew him as a thoughtful, helpful and witty man, and my acquaintance with him, however brief, graced my life. Roger, the mpingo trees you have helped to plant are a living memory to the generosity of your spirit. Rest in peace. JH

Revised Website

In May, after extensive revisions, the ABCP website was moved to a new server with a permanent domain name- http://www.blackwoodconservation.org. All of the existing photographs on the site were rescanned and many new ones added. Much more information about mpingo as a woodworking material and extensive information about conservation issues regarding it have been added. An editorial citing a review of the current conservation literature makes a compelling argument for the mission of the ABCP.

Sebastian showing well-watered and tended mpingo seedling he planted outside the US AID Office in Dar es Salaam in 1992

The ABCP website has developed into a considerable resource for information about the tree, its uses and related issues so stop by and see the new site if you are Internet-enabled. A web version of this newsletter with all the photographs in color may be viewed there also.

Cambridge Mpingo Project

Expeditions in 1996 and 1998 and one ongoing in the summer of 1999 involving students from Cambridge University have traveled to Tanzania to do research on the mpingo. This project is focusing on botanical studies, interviews with local people to understand their attitudes towards the tree, studying the ecology of the species and research into the socio-economic aspects of mpingo logging.

This long-term research effort is concentrating on obtaining quantitative data on the ecology of the tree and the impact of exploitation. Some interesting information is being developed. For example, in the *Tanzanian Mpingo '96* research near Lindi in southeast Tanzania, a rather large database of mpingo trees was studied and it was determined that the population of trees was highly skewed towards younger trees. It generally seems that many of the older, more mature trees have died or been harvested. One effect of this may be to limit genetic diversity because the base population serving to resupply seed stock is heavily weighted towards younger rather than older trees which have proven their desirable traits of long-term survivability.

Steve Ball, project leader in 1996-8, states in his *Report on Tanzanian Mpingo '96* that, "Perhaps through strong, pro-active measures *Dalbergia melanoxylon* can serve as a 'flagship species' for the conservation of Tanzanian woodlands as a whole. A strategy for sustainable harvesting could save the mpingo as an ecological, economic and artistic resource for future generations." Steve has graciously shared his research with the ABCP, and reports and photographs from the first two Cambridge Mpingo Project expeditions may be viewed on the ABCP website from a link in the Sitemap on the homepage.

Conservation Literature

From a review of recent conservation literature regarding mpingos, the following statements are extracted. Hazel Sharman writes in her 1995 Master's Thesis for the University of Edinburgh that "The case of *Dalbergia melanoxylon* is a classic example of a species which although of local, national and international value and importance is being totally neglected in terms of conservation….(it) is in fact the most highly valued traded timber in the world and is of cultural, ecological and economic significance where it grows. This is particularly true for Kenya, Tanzania and Mozambique, where the species is important at local, national and international scales. The combination of these facts imply that the trade and use of *Dalbergia melanoxylon* are not likely to stop, and without the implementation of carefully designed management plans the exploitation may continue until it is no longer economically viable, which may, unfortunately correspond with extinction.".

Also in a Master's Thesis for the University of Edinburgh in the same year, David Beale writes that in a process known as "high grading" only the most mature and straightest (most marketable) trees are removed from the ecosystem. This "pattern of exploitation …could signal the beginning of a downward spiral of increasing costs and a declining mpingo stock which could lead towards com-

mercial extinction." Biological extinction may not be imminent in the short term, but studies such as cited above buttress the argument that it is time to take concrete and direct action for conservation of this species to maintain its genetic diversity and long-term viability.

Nursery attendant Mama Mariamu holding a 6-month old mpingo seedling at the Moshi Mpingo Plot

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ABCP

So that
the song
of the
Tree of Music
will not go
silent...