

Towards a Sustainable Future for Mpingo

On January 2, 2017 the 17th meeting (CoP17) of CITES, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, made conservation history by passing the most far-ranging measures ever adopted by the organization. It is referred to as “the most critical meeting in the 43-year history of CITES.” Of relevance to the ABCP is that CoP17 included all *Dalbergia* species under its regulatory mandate, amounting to the addition of 200 tree species, many of which are threatened, like African blackwood.

CITES Secretary-General, John E. Scanlon, said “CITES CoP17 was a game changer for the world’s wildlife, with international trade in 500 more species brought under CITES controls, including high value marine and timber species. CITES also adopted a vast array of bold and powerful decisions addressing critical areas of work, such as curbing corruption and cyber-crime, and developing well-targeted strategies to reduce demand for illegal wildlife. These far-reaching outcomes of CoP17 will have impact on wildlife and ecosystems, as well as on people and economies. We are all now focused on the implementation of these decisions for which we need equally bold concrete actions.”

Founded in 1973, CITES is a multinational treaty between 183 countries of the world (with 12 abstaining), and its protective range has grown to include over 35,000 species. Its mandate has the force of law, which is administered at local levels by the cooperating parties. The passage of CoP17 has issued a warning call throughout the music, woodworking and wood supply industries, and all are trying to determine a way forward to insure future supply and access to materials.



Makonde Mpingo Sculpture



Ornamental Turning—Mpingo and Mother of Pearl Clock Tower designed and crafted by James Harris

For mpingo conservation, sustainable harvesting has often been promulgated as the most effective strategy for the future, but with the rise of international environmental crime, forest resources in poor countries can be easily exploited and tree populations quickly decimated. (See related story, page 6.) In eastern Africa, the only location on the continent where commercially usable stands of the tree remain, mpingo has become commercially extinct in so many areas that replanting is the only viable option to insure a future for the species as a whole.

For this reason the ABCP has relied on a paradigm that combines local education with the implementation of replanting programs in protected and environmentally appropriate areas. To our knowledge it is the only long-term replanting project dedicated to conservation of the species. As the world turns its attention to designing and implementing a legal framework to enforce the CITES agreement, we ask for your support to ensure the continuity of one of the most artistically treasured woods on the planet – Mpingo, the Tree of Music.

Elizabeth Honored by Jane Goodall

On July 21, 2017, Elizabeth Chuwa, ABCP Co-director, was acknowledged by Jane Goodall for her work in conservation and community empowerment. Presented with a certificate at ceremonies in Moshi, she was cited for her “dedication, commitment and passion.” Through many years Elizabeth has cooperated with Roots and Shoots, Goodall’s youth education network, to establish groups in Kilimanjaro schools and teach children the importance of protecting natural resources.

Elizabeth has been a primary school teacher since 1984,



Elizabeth (back row holding certificate) with her students at Roots and Shoots environmental ceremony where she was honored by British primatologist Jane Goodall, center.

beginning her career at Ngorongoro Primary School. She is presently principal of Sungu Primary, a school on Mt. Kilimanjaro. She has been instrumental in designing conservation curriculum subjects for the area’s educational system, setting up school nurseries to supply trees for environmental restoration in the Kilimanjaro watershed, inspiring regular clean-up days, introducing area-wide Environmental Day celebrations and leading adult awareness campaigns for conservation.

She has also worked with a number of women’s tree planting groups which have established tree nurseries and collectively raised awareness about programs that can be implemented at a grassroots level to relieve the strain on natural ecosystems. Such initiatives protect water sources from excessive erosion and pollution. Sungu Primary is on the southern

slope of Mt. Kilimanjaro, the primary watershed for much of northern Tanzania. Communities who live on the mountain are banding together to share information and design wise-use practices in order to protect the local streams which feed the rivers supplying water and electricity to downstream users.

Elizabeth has always been an important cornerstone of the ABCP, working alongside her fellow teachers in implementing important work for community and environmental needs in this impressively beautiful and ecologically important area. The programs they have helped establish not only protect the environment, but lead to economic empowerment in the lives of their friends and neighbors.

Dismas at Ngorongoro Conservation Area

Dismas Macha, ABCP Co-director, has held a professional position with the Natural Resources Department of the Ngorongoro Conservation Area (NCA) since 1990, and is now a Senior Assistant Conservation Officer. In this capacity he has witnessed the numerous threats that are impinging on Africa’s natural ecosystems of flora and fauna.

He writes, “The world is undergoing an extinction crisis – the most rapid loss of biodiversity in the planet’s history – and this loss is likely to accelerate as the climate changes. The impact of climate change on wildlife is already notable at local, regional and global levels. The direct impact on species that humans make use, of or with which we compete, affects human communities in a very immediate way; the loss of biodiversity is our loss as well.”

The NCA, one of Africa’s most notable protected areas, covers a total area of over 3,000 mi², and is considered one of the natural wonders of the world. Lying along the East African Rift System, at its center is an extinct volcanic caldera 10-12 miles in diameter. It is part of the Serengeti ecosystem of Tanzania and Kenya, and because the whole system has been pro-



Above: Elizabeth instructs Sungu students in the planting and care of tree seedlings. Sungu Primary has a school nursery to produce seedlings for reforestation.

Right: Lucy Njuu and Elizabeth deliver mpingo to Halima, a member of a nursery cooperative in rural Moshi.



Above: Omi Primary School nursery at Mweka provides species for domestic and environmental needs.

Right: Elizabeth shows Brian how to plant a tree seedling.





Zebras and pink flamingos gather on the shore of Lake Magadi, a saline lake in the center of the Ngorongoro caldera. Flamingos filter-feed on plankton in the lake through their bills, and carotenoids from this food source give them their pink color.

tected, it is one of the last intact land areas in the world which harbors large and spectacular animal migrations.

Over 1 million wildebeest, 72,000 zebras and 350,000 Thompson and Grant’s gazelles seasonally pass through its fertile grasslands to the west. Within the caldera is a resident population (some endangered) of 25,000 large animals, including cape buffalo, hippopotami, black rhinoceros, cheetah, leopard and the largest lion population in the world.

To the northwest is Oldupai Gorge, (renamed from the original Olduvai) where Louis and Mary Leakey discovered early hominid finds and the earliest traces of human footprints. To the northeast just outside the park boundary is the still active volcano, Ol Doinyo Lengai, which last erupted in 2007. It is unique among active volcanos in that it is the only one that produces lava that is rich in carbonates rather than the silicates comprising other igneous deposits.

Botanists employed at Ngorongoro have long been leaders in the conservation of African native species. At Ngorongoro Dismas closely monitors the area north of the main crater, called the Highlands, which comprises 60 percent of the park. Two additional craters dominate the landscape of this area, Olmati and Empakaai. Dismas works to protect the Highland’s ecosystems, monitoring vegetation decline, invasive species, and human and animal degradation. He collects and catalogs NCA plant species for its central herbarium.

Because of his work in interfacing with the villages surrounding the periphery of the conservation area, he also has



Ngorongoro Conservation Authority Nursery supervisor Naman H. Naman (rt) supplies tree seedlings to Dismas (lt) who works with surrounding communities in reforestation initiatives.

experience in teaching conservation and helping communities implement projects with both economic and environmental goals. He is engaged in outreach to these localities as shown in the accompanying photos. The NCA operates a central nursery at Karatu that produces 50,000 seedlings a year. By distributing these seedlings Dismas is helping villages to plant species that preserve local environments and supply domestic needs for fuelwood, medicines, food and shade. This boosts local economies and reduces impingement on Ngorongoro protected forested areas.

Cyril Chuwa Attends Mweka College

As a young boy Cyril learned about plants and traveled with his father, Sebastian Chuwa, to establish outreach programs for the ABCP in areas suitable for growing mpingo, visiting institutions and individuals who might be enlisted in replanting efforts. As a result of this early influence, Cyril is now intent on carrying forward work begun by his late father.

To this end in 2016 Cyril Chuwa began studies at the College of African Wildlife Management at Mweka, north of Moshi, the institution attended by Sebastian. At the end of his studies he will have fulfilled requirements for a certification in Wildlife Management. Coursework at Mweka includes the



Dismas instructs students at Oldonyo Sambu Secondary School in the planting and care of seedlings.

identification and classification of plants and animals, vertebrate and invertebrate biology and the methodology of conducting biodiversity surveys. Other studies include administrative skills necessary for wildlife resource management in national parks, as well as wildlife utilization, captive breeding, herbarium collection and species restoration.

Mweka College was founded in 1963, two years after (then) Tanganyika's independence, as a pioneer institution for the training of wildlife managers. Since then it has been a leader in the industry throughout Africa and regularly sponsors conferences and seminars on wildlife conservation for the African and international community of conservationists.



Mweka College with Mt. Kilimanjaro in the background. The distinctive tree at center is a species of Norfolk Island Pine.

In July Jane Goodall visited Mweka to share with students information about her work with youth groups and her community empowerment program called TACARE. This project works with villagers around national park and reserve areas to raise their standards of living in order to give them alternate means of livelihood, so that overuse of natural resources within the reserves will be reduced, similar to the programs that Dismas oversees with the communities surrounding NCA.



Jane Goodall plants an mpingo seedling from the ABCP Mpingo Nursery.

As part of the activities, Goodall planted an mpingo tree on the campus. The seedling was from the ABCP nursery and Cyril delivered a talk, explaining to Goodall and the students the importance of the species and the focus of ABCP efforts towards its conservation. In northern Tanzania, activities such as these are establishing a more enlightened model to build a future in which ways can be found that enable communities to live within and benefit from the natural world, yet preserve the ancient harmonic balance that is nature's very keynote, thus resulting in benefit to people, plants and animals alike.

Cyril Interviewed for TV5 Monde Series about Mwenge Woodcarving Market

Last fall the ABCP was contacted by a Canadian TV producer who was filming a program about the Mwenge Woodcarvers Market in Dar es Salaam. The documentary was to be part of a 13-part series called *Markets on Earth*, described as, "an international documentary series focusing on unusual and captivating markets around the world. In each episode, viewers discover the local culture of the region from the point of view of the shopkeepers, the producers and the customers." It would be distributed by TV5Monde, a French cable network distributed in 200 countries around the world. Other programs in the series included a flower market in India, a spice market in Indonesia, a tea market in Beijing and a camel market in Arabia.

The Mwenge Market is a co-op of over 200 Makonde carvers, who work and sell on the market grounds. The program showcased their exquisite work, primarily using mpingo, and also drew attention to the threatened conservation status of the wood. Cyril related information about the threatened status of the tree and spoke of the work of the ABCP to reestablish populations of the tree in the northern regions of Tanzania.

The burgeoning growth of the east African tourist trade has led to the entry of many more carvers into the marketplace, increasing the already intense pressure on remaining stocks of mpingo. This is particularly notable along the route of the Northern Circuit of Tanzania, so called because of its popular wildlife parks, including the National Parks of Arusha, Tarangire, Lake Manyara, Ngorongoro and Serengeti, as well as Mt. Kilimanjaro, climbed by over 30,000 hikers every year.

Although the tourism has led to a welcome prosperity in many societal sectors, it has also added to the strain on local natural resources. Mpingo carvings have become immensely popular, and are being purchased by art collectors and museums throughout the world, thus adding to its vulnerability.



Cyril explains the history and objectives of ABCP activities towards mpingo conservation to Marie-Justine Fournier, for a French TV program about the Makonde artists of Tanzania.



Michael earned his first level certificate from Iringa College in 2015, and will graduate with a Diploma in Information Technology.

Michael Chuwa

Michael is the oldest son of Sebastian and Elizabeth and he has been interested in computer technology since completing secondary school in Moshi in 2009. He studied for two years at the Institute of Accountancy in Arusha and received a certificate as a Basic Technician in Computer Science. To further his computer studies he entered the University of Iringa in south-central Tanzania and after two years received a first level certificate. He is now in his final three years of college and will graduate with a B.S. degree in Information Technology.

His area of specialization will be programming and multimedia subjects and he is primarily interested in the construction of Internet websites. He has just completed a field work assignment on Dynamic Web Development to build skills in designing sophisticated and interactive web content.

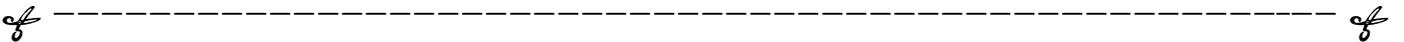
Michael has been an important partner in carrying on the work of the ABCP. Along with his three siblings, he was taught to respect and protect the environment in his childhood years through the family’s participation in the numerous envi-

ronmental initiatives conceived and implemented by Sebastian and Elizabeth during their years of dedicated work in northern Tanzania.

During the past few years Michael and Cyril have cooperated in distributing a variety of tree seedlings from the Mpingo Nursery to schools and churches in different area of northern Tanzania, instructing students and teachers in the planting and long term care of the species distributed. With Dismas, they have renovated the ABCP Mpingo Nursery structure and continue to oversee the ongoing work of producing seedlings.

Three generations of the Chuwa family have been active in teaching the principles of conservation to Kilimanjaro communities. Michael Iwaku Chuwa, Sebastian’s father, was an accomplished herbalist who taught his neighbors the science of deriving medicinal remedies from plant species on Kilimanjaro. Sebastian followed his path by instituting numerous programs that simultaneously conserved nature and enhanced human welfare. Elizabeth and Sebastian’s children are now learning the methodologies bringing conservation into the modern era and continue in the important work of their ancestors.

Michael unloading seedlings from the ABCP Toyota Land Cruiser, funded by the Rolex Awards for Enterprise.



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A version of this newsletter with color photos can be viewed on the ABCP website at www.blackwoodconservation.org.

International Trafficking in Endangered Species

The CoP17 meeting was not the first time that international attention was drawn to threats to mpingo. In 1994 a proposal for a CITES listing for *Dalbergia melanoxylon* was submitted by Kenya and Germany, but because there was insufficient information about the tree and regulation of its trade met with opposition from commercial interests, it was withdrawn. Unfortunately in the years since, Africa has come under increased threat, targeted by many criminal cartels which have taken advantage of the expanding economic potential of rising middle classes in Asia and China. Their illegal activities have decimated exotic timbers and wildlife species in numerous areas. African nations, many of which are the poorest in the world, suffer from lack of infrastructure in their wildlife and wooded areas and its poverty-stressed populations can be vulnerable to such criminal elements. Ironically few Africans have profited to any large extent compared to those in countries where the illegal products are used and traded.

The CITES decision was supported by a number of studies, one of which was submitted by Germany. Entitled, “Trade Study of Selected East African Timber Production Species,” it presents information about timber availability, logging and illegal harvesting of three economically important species, one of which is African blackwood. Attention is given to the role of China in the often illegal harvesting and export of valuable hardwoods in Africa since the turn of the century. China outlawed logging on its own mainland in 1998, and since then has relied on international imports to supply its domestic needs for timber and wood products. With its rapid industrialization and growing personal wealth, there has been a precipitous rise in desire for consumer goods with little regard for their conservation status. Although international focus is often on threats to endangered and threatened animal species, the illegal timber trade accounts for far greater revenue amounts. Some rosewood species are even known as “blood timbers” because of the connection between their illegal trade and rebel group uprisings.

The path to sustainability must undoubtedly rely on a multi-dimensional approach. Brazil has reduced deforestation by 50% through combining utilization of satellite data and effective policing. Groups working in China sponsor TV ads that enlighten an often unknowing public about the endangered species used in ivory carvings, shark fin soup and medicinal products. Worldwide, conservation groups are organizing to address particular aspects of the global crisis. It is crucial that knowledgeable people from all countries educate themselves about the conservation status of the products they use and support those causes that are directed towards establishing modalities of reasonable use, protection and replacement. In these crucial times decisive action is imperative to preserve the exquisite diversity of the natural world – the source of sustenance for us all.

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