



Safari Convention - April 2011

REPORT

Report written by Barbara Heinzen,
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The Barbets Duet Safari Convention, April 2011

The 2011 Barbet Convention was scheduled for Easter weekend in Molo, Uganda, hosted by James Magode Ikuya and MIAFI – the Molo Intergrated Agric-Farming Initiative. This visit was the high point of the Safari Convention, a memorable and important first sight of the work in Uganda. However, because people from the two Kenyan sites could not reach Molo that weekend, the Safari Convention was born. A group from Tanzania travelled to Molo and the two Kenyan sites. Thanks are due to Mwajuma Masaiganah for lending her vehicle and moving us across East Africa with wise thoughtfulness and foresight. Thanks also go to Abdallah Uledi who drove many kilometers with calm good humour. Their fellow travelers, Mwajuma Mabewa and Machano Ally Jingalao from Msichoke and Barbara Heinzen from the UK, benefited from their patience and care.



Mwajuma Masaiganah



Abdallah Uledi

In addition to visiting the Molo, Seme and Lukenya learning sites in Uganda and Kenya, the group stopped at Mugumu, Serengeti, Tanzania to visit the primary school started by Mwajuma Masaiganah in addition to the Mwasama School in Bagamoyo. The party also stayed with the Obyerodhyambos in Nkoro before driving to Sammy Muvelah’s site in Lukenya. By the time they reached Nairobi, the travelers had covered over 3500km before heading home. Rose Lyimo, from Tanzania and Chris Jones from the UK were unable to join the Convention. However, in March 2011 Barbara Heinzen and Oby Obyerodhyambo visited Chris Jones at Woodland Valley Farm in Cornwall, UK while Rose and Barbara met in Dar es Salaam before the Safari set off.

Safari Convention Visits: March/April 2011

CORNWALL, UK

In a prelude to Safari Convention, Oby Obyerodhyambo took time during a UK trip to visit Chris Jones, Woodland Valley Farm, & the Eden Project in Cornwall with Barbara Heinzen.

MOLO, UGANDA

Thomas Dauncey presents the biodiversity index used in Seme, Kenya, to members of MIAFI in Molo, Uganda. Safari Convention, April 2011

SEME, KENYA

Oil seeds being tested in Molo. Small seeds are castor oil plants, the larger ones are from the Kabaka anjagala tree.

LUKENYA, KENYA

Tanzanian travellers visiting Lukenya site, where Sammy Muvelah is building a guest house. Safari Convention, April 2011

Mwajuma Mabewa of Msi Choke, Tanzania asks Mama Salome to identify plants found in Seme, Kenya. Safari Convention, April 2011

Unlike meetings in the previous two years, the Safari Convention was a journey of practical discovery and demonstrations, with an active trade in seeds and useful advice. Everywhere the travelers went, they found colleagues trying out new ways to expand the ecological health and economic viability of their land. Along the way, the two people from the Msi Choke Seaweed Farmers introduced people at the inland sites to the taste of seaweed, while Mzee Machano Ally identified medicinal plants the others did not always know. In Kenya, at both the Seme and Lukenya sites, water harvesting has been key to increasing the productivity of the land, especially when allied to the planting of native trees for food and fuel. In Uganda, the first fish ponds had been dug and protected against the predation of frogs and monitor lizards. The simple fact of making the effort to visit Molo encouraged MIAFI members who had started later than the other three. At each place, there is renewed interest in the traditional uses of plants for food, medicine and fodder. This interest is changing the interaction between the older and younger generations. In Molo, where the landscape has been recently badly deforested, Magode Ikuya reported that the elders would send the children to look for valuable trees and other plants in order to collect their seeds. As he told it, this small exchange gave the elders new respect and the children new responsibility. At Nkoroi, outside Nairobi, the travelers saw what could be done on a relatively small peri-urban plot. In addition to greenhouse tomatoes, Oby and Hilda were raising chickens, rabbits, fish and bananas, while filling the rest of the garden with a botanical collection of native trees.

Since the Barbets Duet began, Mwajuma Masaiganah, who is the founder of Mwasama Primary School in Bagamoyo, has been working with Msi Choke Cooperative as her primary Barbets Duet learning site. However, during the safari, the travelers started talking about establishing another site at Mama Masaiganah's Mwasama School in Bagamoyo. Rather than being limited to book learning, the pupils would leave the classroom to learn outdoors. Mwasama Primary School has now opened the "Shamba Darasa" or learning garden, in some cases using seeds collected during the Safari Convention.



The Safari Convention was memorable and exhausting. At each stop, the travelers were welcomed like family, received with generosity and warmth. Their hosts always gave the travelers a tour of the work being planned and done, as well as making time for shared discussion and trading of knowledge. There were no stunning insights, but the slow and persistent efforts at each site to tackle the basic ambitions of the Barbets Duet were impressive. After the excitement of getting things started, it is clear that the hard and unpredictable effort of translating passionate ideas to practical reality has begun. While the experience has been discouraging at times, the Safari Convention showed that people are committed to continuing. They are also continuing to learn how to achieve their separate and collective goals.

*Report written by
Barbara Heinzen, 13 June 2012*