

Mbambakofi

Newsletter for the Arabuko-Sokoke Area

Volume 2, Issue 1

Welcome to Mbambakofi!

We are pleased to bring you the newest edition of the Mbambakofi Newsletter! Through this newsletter we intend to keep you updated and informed about activities and events happening in and around the Arabuko-Sokoke area. Just south of Malindi, the area includes Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, Mida Creek, Gede and Watamu - an area rich in natural beauty and biodiversity.

As more community groups do conservation and development projects in this area, it is now more important than ever for them to network and share ideas, resources and support. Especially as more groups develop eco-tourism activities in an effort to generate an income while enhancing conservation, the more they need an avenue to promote these activities to visitors. We hope this newsletter will help serve both purposes!

If you have any ideas or feedback regarding the newsletter, or you know someone interested in receiving it, please email us at asfecotourism@yahoo.com. Asante sana!



Introducing the Arabuko-Sokoke Eco-Tourism Circuit - Explore the Beauty Beyond the Beach

Over the last several years, many community groups and local organisations have developed eco-tourism activities in and around the Arabuko-Sokoke Forest area. These activities not only help generate an income for local people, they also serve to encourage and expand biodiversity conservation. Eco-tourism activities are an ideal way for local communities to benefit from the tourism industry by engaging people to share their unique, natural environment with visitors.

However, the biggest obstacle for these community groups is in raising awareness and promoting their eco-tourism ventures. Most communities lack the resources to market themselves adequately which means most tourism industry businesses, and by extension visitors, don't know about their activities.

In an effort to bridge the gap between the community and the tourism industry, and ultimately encourage conservation, Nature Kenya has introduced the Arabuko-Sokoke Eco-Tourism Circuit including Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, Mida Creek, and Gede Ruins with Kipepeo. Our hope is that the circuit will help promote eco-tourism and generate an income for local people while also highlighting this important biodiversity area.



Map of the Arabuko-Sokoke Eco-Tourism Circuit

Nature Kenya will be promoting the circuit through presentations to hotel guests, distributing posters and brochures to hotels and tour companies, doing site visits with hotel excursion staff and tour operators as well as marketing through tourism websites and printed media.

We also want to improve these activities and the visitors' experience, so we welcome your comments and feedback! Please feel free to email asfecotourism@yahoo.com.

Inside this issue:

Introduction	1
The Arabuko-Sokoke Eco-Tourism Circuit	1
Arabuko-Sokoke Forest	2
Mida Creek	2
Gede Ruins & Kipepeo	3
Trail Clearing in Arabuko-Sokoke Forest	3
Community Exhibition at Gede Ruins Museum	4
Monthly Bird Walks in Arabuko-Sokoke Forest	4

ARABUKO-SOKOKE FOREST

Arabuko-Sokoke Forest is part of an indigenous dry coastal forest that once stretched from Somalia to Mozambique. Now, it is the only section of this coastal forest remaining in Eastern & Southern Africa. Regarding bird and biodiversity conservation, it's been internationally recognized as the second most important forest in all of mainland Africa. Arabuko-Sokoke's extremely rich biodiversity supports over 500 species of birds, butterflies, reptiles and mammals, including elephants and monkeys. Of the animals in the forest, there are over ten species that are either globally endangered or threatened, or are endemic to the forest meaning they're found nowhere else on earth.

- Education & Visitor's Centre – Displays history & information about the forest and sells various informational guide books and maps



- Guided hikes with professional local guides – The guides know the best places to go and are extremely knowledgeable about all the plants & animals found in the forest
- Specialty tours including bird-watching & night walks – Arabuko-Sokoke is known for its extensive and rare birdlife while some animals can only be seen at night



- Bicycling – There are bicycles for hire and a professional guide can take you through the forest to places beyond walking distance



- Driving trails – For those interested in seeing more of the forest without using a lot of time
- Hike, cycle or drive to the Tree Platform – There are amazing views of the forest and is a perfect place to have a picnic lunch
- Hike, cycle or drive to Nyari Viewpoint – Enjoy extensive and spectacular views of the forest, nearby Mida Creek & the Indian Ocean



MIDA CREEK TIDAL INLET & MANGROVE FOREST

Mida Creek is a large tidal area including an extensive & diverse mangrove forest that is home to eight of the nine different species of mangrove trees. Arabuko-Sokoke Forest & Mida Creek actually form one large ecosystem and have been named an UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. The forests exchange fresh and salt water in order to support the significant biodiversity and especially important birdlife in the area. This means Mida Creek serves as an important stopover point for hundreds of bird species migrating between Europe, Asia & the Middle East. Especially at low tide, when the seawater retreats to the Indian Ocean, birds come to feed on the little crabs and animals left exposed on the expansive mud flats.



- Guided walks with professional local guides either through the mangrove forests & mud flats at low tide, or along a suspended boardwalk through the mangrove forest at high tide
- The suspended boardwalk leads to an enclosed hut, called a Birdhide, and an open air balcony for viewing birds, relaxing and enjoying the view



- Guided canoe trips in traditional dugout canoes through the channel of the tidal area and up to nearby Kirepwe Island



- Guided tour of the Arab ruins on Kirepwe Island which have yet to be fully explored and excavated
- Traditional picnic lunch prepared and served on Sudi Island including fish or lobster and local foods like coconut rice & fruit
- Guided village walks & traditional Giriama dance per-



GEDE RUINS MONUMENT & KIPEPEO HOUSE

Gede Ruins Monument is the remnants of a large Swahili town that was settled first in the 13th century & again in the 17th century. There are actually ruins of Swahili towns all along the Kenyan coast, but Gede is currently the largest known of these and certainly the most extensively excavated. It includes a huge central area of historical ruins as well as a large network of nature trails that meander through the surrounding forest and lead to tons of lesser ruins.

On the Gede Ruins Monument site is the Kipepeo House. Kipepeo, which is Kiswahili for butterfly, is a programme that trains & supports local farmers to breed the butterflies unique to Arabuko-Sokoke Forest. These butterflies are then sold by Kipepeo to butterfly houses all over the world as well as transferred to the Kipepeo House to breed and be displayed for visitors. Through this programme, Kipepeo has actively engaged local communities in conserving Arabuko-Sokoke Forest.



- Guided tours with professional local guides around the large central area of excavated ruins and along the nature trail system to see the lesser ruins

- The tree platform is situated in the middle of the site and it has great views looking down onto the top of the ruins

- A museum and exhibition hall displays artifacts discovered at the site and traditional items that have been recreated

- Another exhibition hall features a rotation of displays – From 6th December until 30th January there is a showcase of products and handicrafts made by local community groups



- Guided, educational walk through Kipepeo House to see the resident butterflies and the butterfly hatching cages

- Traditional Giriama dance performances that feature guests in the performance



The Kipepeo project also sells 100% pure honey from farmers living around Arabuko-Sokoke Forest. To buy some contact Maria at 0724-874-629 or kipepeo@africaonline.co.ke

Clearing Nature Trails in Arabuko-Sokoke Forest

By: Caroline Lumosi, Friends of Arabuko-Sokoke Forest

Justice was served to the Arabuko-Sokoke Forest - Elephant trail. The trail was in desperate need of repair and it couldn't come too soon. Nature Kenya and Friends of Arabuko-Sokoke Forest (FoASF) members came together to clear the nature trail in the forest. Armed with pangas, slashes and even axes the 21 people team set out with one mission in mind, to help clear the nature trail and restore it to its beauty once more!

The trail had been in long need of repairs after elephants trampled on some shrubs and trees. The KWS security team and ASF guides joined the team from Nature Kenya and FoASF. After the hard work we managed to clear approximately 3 KM of the elephant trail in three days. This was a great achievement and an encouragement to the Arabuko-Sokoke community members.



Clearing the Nature Trail



Taking a break at Mida Creek

The trails will need more repair work soon as they get overgrown quite often. The elephants also contribute to the destruction of the trails as they are constantly moving about. It was interesting to get a near close encounter with one of the elephants as the team was busy working on the trails, luckily it was harmless.

The team also visited community groups and learn how they contribute to conservation while earning a living. They visited with the Arabuko-Sokoke Forest Guides Association, Mida Creek Conservation & Awareness Group, Kipepeo Butterfly Project, Watamu Turtle Watch and A Rocha Kenya.

Community Crafts Exhibition & Sale at Gede Ruins Museum

Self-Help Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SHAPE Africa), a CBO based in Malindi, along with Gede Ruins Monument and Nature Kenya have partnered to host a Community Crafts Exhibition & Sale at Gede Ruins Museum from 6th December until 30th January. The exhibit is a marketplace for local community groups to sell products or promote their services as a means to generate an income. Groups will be selling unique crafts, promoting eco-tourism activities and spreading the word about their community projects.

We are especially highlighting products and activities that are conservation based or "eco-friendly" because using resources wisely not only benefits the local environment and community, but also contributes to poverty alleviation for families. So we are planning an Open Day on 24th January to invite the community to participate in raising awareness of local conservation issues and showcase innovative products made from recycled and sustainable natural materials. This will be a great opportunity for anyone interested in environmental and community issues to learn, network and be inspired by local people.

The exhibit is being held in the Gede Ruins Exhibition Hall, which is open 7am to 6pm everyday, and is free of charge so you have every reason to come and support this great community initiative!



Last Community Crafts Exhibition & Sale

Join us for the Community Open Day on 24th January from 10am - 4pm where we'll showcase eco-friendly products made by community groups and host discussions on conservation activities in the area.

Monthly Bird Walks in Arabuko-Sokoke Forest

Join the guides of the Arabuko-Sokoke Forest Guides Association for their monthly bird walk and find out everything you never knew you didn't know about birds!

The bird walks are the first Saturday of every month leaving the Arabuko-Sokoke Visitors Centre at 6:30am returning by 9-10am. The guides visit a different part of the forest every week so there's always a reason to come again!



Upcoming Activities:

- 6th December through 30th January - Community Crafts Exhibition & Sale at Gede Ruins Monument (more info above)
- 24th January - Community Open Day at Crafts Exhibition & Sale (more info above)
- 6th December & 3rd January - Monthly bird walks in Arabuko-Sokoke Forest

In the Next Issue:

- KEFRI is making a new nature trail in Arabuko-Sokoke Forest to highlight their activities
- More information on the eco-tourism ventures in Sabaki Estuary & Dakatcha Woodland
- Details on the Community Open Day being held at the Crafts Exhibition & Sale

Mbambakofi

Newsletter for the Arabuko-Sokoke Area

Nature Kenya
Mbambakofi Newsletter
PO Box 11 - 80208
Gede, Kenya

Phone: +254 (0) 727-975-157
E-mail: asfecotourism@yahoo.com



Mbambakofi is brought to you by Nature Kenya, a national conservation organisation that works with national actors and communities living near important biodiversity areas to promote resource conservation and sustainable community and natural development.

To become a member of Nature Kenya and support our conservation efforts, please contact our Nairobi office.

PO Box 44486, GPO 00100 Nairobi, Kenya www.naturekenya.org