



Senevi & Biso processing Kapok

HALGOLLA PLANTATION HOME

- *THE UNIQUE SRI LANKAN EXPERIENCE* -

NOVEMBER 2017

Work continues apace in our vanilla (*Vanilla planifolia*) field with the tending of vines and training them in a manner that enhances flower production. Despite a family history of growing, harvesting and curing this crop the member of the van der Poorten family now at the helm of Halgolla has to learn all of this anew! We hope that the application of the old adage that goes, “use it or lose it” will apply to this

writer’s grey matter as well! An added impetus in the matter of vanilla production is recent evidence that, perhaps, A. J. van der Poorten was **the** pioneer vanilla grower in what was then Ceylon. In terms of a very local element, Senevi who practically grew up on Halgolla is gung-ho with regard to this spice and, as I write this, has, with the participation of the rest of the HPH gang, succeeded in putting down another 65 vines!

A more recent challenge has been the cleaning of kapok (*Ceiba pentandra*) for use as a (superb) pillow-filling. The separation of the “cotton” from the core and then the removal of seeds and other debris does not appear to lend itself to any method other than the laborious manual one traditionally employed. We are working on this challenge in the hope that pillow-production can be added to our growing list of HPH-generated value-added pursuits! If any reader has any suggestions with regard to this challenge, we certainly hope they’ll let us know. Incidentally, **every** pillow at HPH has a kapok filling.

Something that the current generation might not be aware of is the fact that kapok was the filling in life

jackets before the advent of Styrofoam. The primary reason for this was the fact that it did not readily take in water, did, in fact repel liquid.

As far as our jams, jellies chutneys and preserves are concerned, we are continuing the effort to market them despite the challenge from the large producers where, it seems, bulking agents are freely used, something we have eschewed.

For November, as in months’ past, we’ll continue our “Surprise Basket” of HPH “goodies” that appears to delight visitors as they take their leave of us and HPH!

- Certificate of Excellence 2015 from Trip Advisor
- rated as [Best Home Stay](#) in Sri Lanka
- recommended by [Bradt Travel Guide for Sri Lanka](#) 5th edition, 2014

Despite the rainfall we have recently experienced that has alleviated unprecedented drought conditions, we continue with our efforts to improve our water supply. In fact, we have reconciled ourselves to the fact that this will be a life-long pursuit!

As I write this, apart from the very important work in our vanilla field, our meagre field labour resources are being applied to harvesting three of our spice and beverage

crops – pepper, coffee and dries and drabs of an off-season nutmeg crop. While it is not as hectic as it was at the height of the nutmeg season, it still means a great deal of work for Senevi, Biso, Podimenika, Suresh and Selvarajah, most of whom come in on a casual, contract basis, with Suresh filling in as chauffeur when required. Challenges! Challenges!

Sad to say, our old faithful “Heinz 57” canine, “Natta”, is

showing her years, a significant drop in vision being



This month's trick question: spot the Cocoa Lizard!

the primary manifestation. Oh, well, at least she can keep the writer company in coping with galloping decrepitude!

Suresh's and Keerthika's one-year old continues to enliven the atmosphere of our home and completes the generational make up of HPH!

For those who have found the "lizard among the cocoa leaves" on the previous page: sorry but there isn't a prize for your sharp eyes! Not this month, anyway!



Our 150(?) year old hot-water geyser

According to oral history available to us, our firewood-fuelled geyser that is the source of all the hot water at HPH, harks back to early British colonial days when it was housed in a lodge in a place called Micklefield in the community of Gurutalawa in the mountains of Uva.

What I've been told is that the first British planters in the Uva hills hunted jackals in lieu of the foxes of their homeland and ended up with a hearty celebration at the end of the day. This geyser supplied the hot water that they soaked in at the end of the hunt which was followed by a great celebration with the ingestion of copious quantities of spirituous substances!

Unfortunately, the story of how this geyser ended up at HPH such a long, long time later will have to await another opportunity. Suffice it to say, for now, that it has been subjected to some repairs but is, essentially, the same as it was way back in those jackal-hunting days!

We've had the foliage which was beginning to obstruct our view down the Weuda valley trimmed by the fantastically agile Selvarajah and this has, among other things given us an unobstructed view of the *Sapu* trees (*Michelia champaca*) at the lower reaches of the vanilla patch. These trees, from the blossoms of which a perfume is distilled in India, were once the

magnet for the Hill Mynah (*Gracula ptilogenys*), the famous "talking mynah bird" of years gone by. They were conspicuous by their absence at the time the writer came back from Canada a dozen years ago. Since then, we've been able to save some young *Sapu* trees which have now begun to blossom, the Grackles are back, heralding the wet weather with their unique, most times mellifluous, but sometimes raucous, calls.



Hill mynah (*Gracula ptilogenys*)

As we will never tire of repeating, you, dear reader of this little bulletin, are one of those who help us to keep HPH going as the place we have meant it to be. Needless to add, your recommendation of it to friends and family is essential if we are to continue what those who've experienced it feel is a truly unique Sri Lankan experience. Please feel free to disseminate it as widely as possible!

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