

Blaise Patricia Cooke:

On completion of a rather basic biology honours degree at Portsmouth Polytechnic, I was fortunate to have the opportunity to be employed at the RBG Kew as a student on the 3-year Diploma course in Horticulture. After the course, and having worked in the *in vitro* laboratories on orchid propagation research, I joined an RBG project working in Madagascar. Over 15 months based in the capital city, Antananarivo, at the national botanic garden - Parc Tsimbazaza, I did garden development work, grant writing and training of gardeners. I also had many opportunities to explore the country and to learn about the native vegetation. A period working through Missouri Botanical Gardens at the Paris Herbarium on Malagasy plant collections, followed by a year employed in the gardens of the *Museum National d'Histoire Naturelle* in Paris, led me back to Madagascar and to the Parc Tsimbazaza in 1991 for 18 months as a Technical Consultant funded by the MBG.

Some years later, and unexpectedly finding myself back in Madagascar in 1999, I set up a landscape design and maintenance business, with the view of promoting sustainable garden landscapes using native plants. I developed and ran this business: **Phyto-Logic Paradise Gardens**, until 2016. It is reflections on this aspect of my work that I would like to present to the Africa Group of U3A.

I am now living in Cambridge, working as a gardener / designer and developing a landscape company – **iViridis**.