



Newsletter No. 79

Centennial Park Bush Society Newsletter



April 2015

The Morton Legacy



Joe Greig

Photo – Richard Hursthouse

Pat Morton's park seat, just below the Avenue of Remembrance, takes in one of Centennial Park's most spectacular vistas and it was here, in March 2011, that I last caught up with Pat, quietly gazing out over the trees – many of which she planted – to the sparkling Hauraki Gulf beyond. Pat's husband, noted zoologist Professor John Morton, had died a few days before. "It was a good funeral," I said. "Do you think so?" came the modest reply. John's funeral had been huge – eulogies from academic and church peers and the many written obituaries were glowing. John was, as a North Shore Times headline stated, A Battler For The Environment -- who played a key role in saving Whirinaki Forest from logging and establishing the marine biology laboratory at Leigh. Sadly, Pat also died, just days later, but what a legacy she and John left: Centennial Park's 28 hectares of regenerating podocarp forest. The Mortons intervened to save the bush in 1976, when East Coast Bays City Council intended clearing it, and Pat chaired the Centennial Park Bush Society for the next 25 years. "It is not distinguished bush," they wrote in their booklet *Just Scrub*. "But its future is there in its soil, its seed sources and its nursery of manuka scrub."

How right they were. Forty years on Centennial Park is young podocarp forest, with native trees piercing the canopy and a rich native understorey. It can only get better. The Mortons provided the motivation for volunteers, past and present, to control weeds and plant new natives. These days Pat and John's macrocarpa benches are crumbling away – but their gift to Auckland grows from strength to strength.

Joe Greig

Spectacular Pohutukawa



Photo – Richard Hursthouse

Everybody noticed the unusually profuse flowering of pohutukawa over summer. Wherever we went, from Auckland to Taupo and beyond, New Zealand's iconic Christmas trees – *Metrosideros excelsa* – were in glorious red bloom and people were taking photos. I have tried to find out what triggers such notably prolific flowering but with no success. Does anyone know the answer? Left to their own devices, these magnificent trees seed in cracks and crevices and thrive on cliff edges, using woody aerial roots as anchors. The pohutukawas along Centennial Park's Avenue of Remembrance, planted in 1940 to celebrate the country's centenary, aren't so perilously placed but are just as spectacular.

Richard Hursthouse



Campbell's Bay Urban Sanctuary

Constant Battle Brings Results

Reducing predator pests in the park is a constant battle, taking more than 120 hours of volunteer time in the past year. Pictured here are the devices we use. The yellow Timms trap is for possum control, baited with apple -- often with a sprinkle of cinnamon or aniseed.

The black box shown with lid open and baited with commercially-produced toxic blocks placed inside sandwich bags, is the park's main defence against rats and mice. We have 78 of these bait stations locked and wired to the bases of trees, approximately 50 metres apart along six lines through the park.

The wooden boxes (Haines traps) are our latest addition. They are for the fiercest predator of all -- the stoat. Each box is baited with an egg or meat. Predators trigger a powerful spring trap as they cross a metal plate on their way to the bait. Six stoat traps, their lids screwed down for safety, are scattered through the park. So far none have been caught and we hope this is a sign the park is stoat-free.

Our pest control activities now extend to willing participants in Campbells Bay who have borrowed from us Timms traps, bait stations, or spring traps. You are the park's very important first line of defence against predators.



Photo – Peter Aimer

Has all this effort made a difference? We think so. In 2014, 23 possums were caught – an average of nearly two per month – and mostly in the Campbells Bay precinct. Since November, however, only one has been reported. Rat bait uptake has also declined over summer, enabling us to rest

the bait stations for three months, to guard against possible bait-shyness among rats. Active baiting will recommence in May, to reduce rat numbers to a minimum before the next bird-nesting season.

We urge anyone around Campbells Bay who can help in this on-going action against predators to do so. If you would like to help, please contact Peter Aimer (p.aimer@xtra.co.nz, 478 8252) to borrow Timms traps or spring traps, or Dick Downing (dick.d@xtra.co.nz, 478 3737) for bait stations and discount rat bait.

Peter Aimer

Steve Phillips - Invaluable Volunteer



Photo – Richard Hursthouse

As this newsletter hits your postbox, Bush Society volunteer Steve Phillips and wife Patsy will be settling into their new Whangarei home and Steve will be hunting round for a new bush restoration project to volunteer for. Steve migrated from Barbados in 1966 and has lived on the Shore for 49 years. He retired from his health sector payroll job in 2008, spent six months redecorating his house, then phoned North Shore City Council about volunteering. A keen outdoorsman, Steve wanted work which would keep him fit, so he signed up with the Kaipatiki Project and quickly added Centennial Park Bush Society's Wednesday workers and Forest & Bird's Tuff Crater project to his portfolio. He estimates he has volunteered around 14 hours a week for the last six years – weedbusting, planting, growing plants, maintaining tracks and generally enjoying being outdoors. "It's a great workout," says Steve. "My doctor says she wishes everyone my age was as fit as I am. I enjoy the friendships and camaraderie of volunteering and I like using my brain. Plus it's very rewarding potting up and planting small plants, knowing they will be big trees in 10 years' time." Steve hopes someone comes along to fill the gap he leaves: "The Wednesday guys are in their 70s and 80s. The question is how long can we keep going?" For as long as we have great volunteers like you, Steve! Thank you, good wishes and we'll miss you.

Jenny Chamberlain



We'd love your help on Wednesday mornings, even two or three hours a week makes a huge difference to the park – come along, enjoy the company & workout...

Steps To Remember

Auckland Council plans to construct a short flight of steps near the Rae Road end of the Avenue of Remembrance sometime this year. The steps, commemorating the centenary of World War One, will be named with significant conflicts New Zealanders have been involved in. They will also provide safer, mud-free access to the park's pohutukawa avenue. Bush Society and East Coast Bays RSA member Bob Fairbairn is liaising with Council, the RSA and the Bush Society to bring this important project to fruition. Bob has a shortlist of 30 battles --beginning with the 1899 to 1902 Boer War -- from which around 12 will be selected.

New Nature Trail Guide

The Nature Trail guide's content has been updated and new leaflets have finally been printed. Supplies are available at Rae Road and the start of the trail – at the bottom of the hill, below the tennis courts. The bush is constantly changing -- some plants have died and others have come up. The previous guide was also a bit hard to follow, so hopefully you will enjoy the new improved version. It is also online -- accessible on a smart phone or from our website. If you haven't yet done so, please walk the trail. Take your children or grandchildren. It opens new interest areas and greatly enhances knowledge and appreciation of the diverse range of plants we treasure in the park.

Richard Hursthouse

Hidden Riches



Photo – Richard Hursthouse

Some of the park's vast array of naturally-occurring species take a bit of finding, but it's worth the effort.

May is mushroom month and, during an autumn 2008 foray in the park, 74 species were found – a stunning result for an area so close to housing. Take a walk when rain has woken up the spores and search rotting logs and leaf litter for Centennial Park's hidden fungal riches. Look carefully and you'll find this little gem: the birdnest fungus, or *Crucibulum laeve* – which grows on native twigs and sticks.

The flax notcher, the handsome moth pictured here, hides among dead cabbage tree leaves, or other suitable crevices during the day, coming out at night to mate and lay eggs. Its caterpillars feed along the edges of phormium leaves – both *tenax* and *cookianum* – creating the distinctive notches which give the moth its name. The flax notcher moth has a 36 to 48mm wingspan and is found throughout New Zealand.



Photo Landcare Research

Thus far, moonlit walks through the park with a handheld bat detector -- borrowed from Auckland Council's bat expert Ben Paris -- have not revealed any local colonies of New Zealand's native long-tailed bat. The Council and the University of Auckland have joined forces to locate and protect the rare creature's remaining roosting sites. Long-tailed bats feed on moths, beetles, midges and mosquitoes and bear one pup per year. Bat walks will continue during autumn.

AGM & Public Talk – 20 May

You are most welcome (member or not) to come join us on 20 May 7.30pm at Campbells Bay School Staffroom.

After a brief AGM we will hear from **Dr James Russell**. James, a University of Auckland researcher who is internationally recognised for his conservation work, was winner of the 2012 Prime Minister's MacDiarmid Emerging Scientist Prize. James will talk about **Predator Free New Zealand** and touch on some of his ground breaking research into predator control.



Alas All Hallows



Lobbying to have a protective covenant placed on the bush pocket next to historic All Hallows church, at the bottom of Park Rise, alas failed. The church property went on the market on 18 March and tenders close on 16 April. Enquiries thus far indicate a strong possibility the church building will be retained and we hope that as much of the bush as possible may be saved too. Given recent law changes which allow wholesale clearance of bush and large native trees and the drive to maximise profit by filling every centimetre of land with buildings we are not optimistic.

Traps and Bait Stations for Loan

If you are keen to help control rats or possums on your property please contact us. Full instruction and training offered.

For secure bait stations and discount rat bait

Contact Dick Downing dick.d@xtra.co.nz
478 3737

For rat traps, secure rat trap tunnels and Timm's traps for trapping possums

Contact Peter Aimer p.aimer@xtra.co.nz
478 8252

Can you help out twice a year with this newsletter?

We are searching for someone with the necessary skills to collate this newsletter twice a year in March and October. We will supply all text and photos. You will lay out the document using Word or your choice of DTP software. If you can help please contact Richard on 410 5339 or bushsoc@gmail.com

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Contact Us

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