



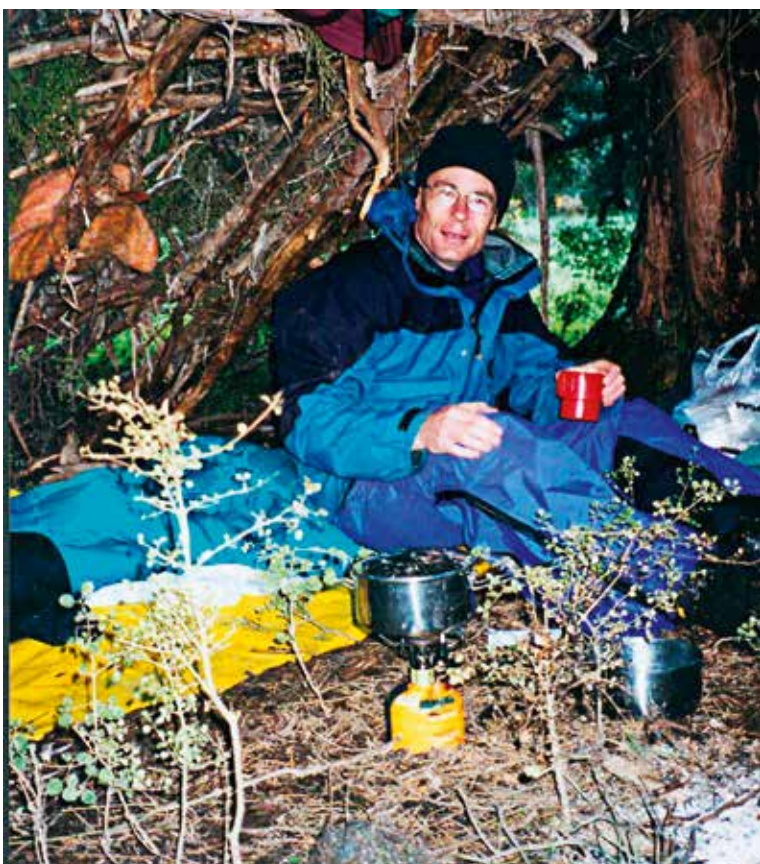
Richard Hursthouse

Dr Richard Hursthouse has been in general practice in Browns Bay for 30 years, serving the intergenerational health needs of local families. For over 18 years he has dedicated much of his spare time towards supporting the restoration, maintenance and protection of the reserves, wetlands, beaches and bush areas in and around the North Shore.

Richard was born in Hastings and grew up in Havelock North. His father, Dan Hursthouse, was a dentist. His mother, Margaret, had a degree in home science, worked in the community with kindergarten and women's groups, and was a local borough councillor for many years. She had a particular interest in developing and maintaining local parks.

Richard did well at school and in 1974 went to Dunedin to study medicine at the University of Otago. Medicine offered an academic challenge and the opportunity to help people. After first working as a house surgeon in Christchurch, Richard then moved to London in 1981 with his future wife, Karen Brook, who was an orthodontist. There he studied paediatrics for two years. The couple returned to live in New Zealand in 1983, initially to Christchurch where Richard completed the general practice training programme, and in 1984 they moved to Campbells Bay where they raised their three children.

Richard was active in medical politics for a few years and led the development of Shore Care, the first 24-hour service, in the mid-1990s. His first community involvement was as a parent at Campbells Bay School. Attached to the school grounds are two hectares of bush which, in the mid-1990s, were heavily overgrown and infested with invasive weeds. *Fiona George was also a parent at the school and she had developed a restoration plan to create a community forest on the site.* Richard was inspired by the vision of a community forest and took on the role of organising volunteers, while Fiona managed the project. Richard had no experience in environmental restoration and the early stages of the community forest project was a steep learning curve in organising a community volunteer project and implementing weed control, replanting and maintenance. Scores of volunteers shaped the forest over ten years. Many weekends were spent laying down boardwalks through the trees with materials and equipment donated or subsidised by local



Richard's bivy on the wrong side of a flooded river, 2002

businesses. The Campbells Bay Community Forest was officially opened in August 2000 as part of the school's 75th anniversary celebrations. *It is an inspiring legacy, and a natural education and community resource still maintained by volunteers and the children at the school.*

Soon after, Richard became involved with the Centennial Park Bush Society. The Society was started in 1976 by a group of concerned local residents led by Campbells Bay locals Pat Morton and Emeritus Professor John Morton. *The area had been gazetted as a crown reserve in the early 1900s but in 1976 the Council started to clear an area of native bush. Pat and John Morton were able to convince the Council that the park contained the beginnings of a*



Richard on the Hump Ridge Track, 2005

native forest. The Mortons led a team of volunteers for 25 years, reducing pest plants and planting hundreds of native trees. As the original volunteers were aged, new, younger blood was required.

In 2004, Richard was invited to join the Centennial Park Bush Society committee as the chairperson. *I had been a largely inactive member of the Society since we moved to Campbells Bay in 1986, but working in the Community Forest made me realise the massive weed issue facing Centennial Park.*

Invasive foreign species like wattle, pampas and monkey apple were rapidly crowding out the native vegetation. As he took up the challenge, Richard's guide to plant management in the park was a small reference book entitled *Just Scrub*, written and illustrated by

the Mortons, which describes almost every plant and tree found in the Campbells Bay bush.

Management of pest trees proved controversial. The most invasive pest trees at that time were the Australian monkey apple (*Acmena smithii*), the Sydney Golden Wattle and *pinus pinaster*. Richard knew that these weeds could only be controlled if the established parent plants were removed. In 2005 the Bush Society was granted consent by North Shore City Council to remove 80 large monkey apple trees, 100 pine trees and a block of wattle trees over the next ten years. These trees were to be removed from Centennial Park and the golf course, and replaced with large native and exotic trees. However, this would not happen without a fight. *Some local people didn't understand that these trees were invasive. They didn't want such large established trees cut down.* The consent was unsuccessfully challenged in the Environment Court. *However, the Council then chose to review the Park management plan and reduced the number of pines and wattles that could be removed.*

As the pest plant problem has become more manageable, the Bush Society has broadened its focus to include management of pest possums and rodents, which decimate the bird life. Richard led the establishment of a comprehensive baiting grid, run by volunteers, once the Council allowed the Society to manage the task. The laborious task of baiting has been highly successful, with the possums banished and the rat population much reduced. As a result, the bird life is now increasing and Richard has noticed a distinct increase in the fantail population. Each month he tries to join an early morning group of bird enthusiasts who count the number of different species heard. They now have nine years of bird-count data. *As a bush society, we are also keen to protect the*

aquatic life in the park. One problem is that many domesticated dogs scramble on the banks of the streams and stir up the mud in the water, which is harmful to the fish. We have worked to get tighter by-laws restricting dogs around streams.

In 2009, Richard led the launch of the Campbells Bay Urban Sanctuary. This is a visionary project. *I want us to work to remove all the pest plants and animals in the whole Campbells Bay catchment. This will enhance the wildlife and ultimately we hope to see the bellbird return to the Bays.* The first step is to extend predator control into the neighbouring private properties. Restoration work has now also extended to Greville Reserve, the Campbells Bay Methodist Church bush, the garden at the Campbells Bay dairy and the stream at Huntly Reserve by the beach; the Bush Society continues to work with the golf club to manage the bush on the course.

The work in the park and surrounds is managed by a small, keen group of volunteers who are motivated by their love of the park.

Volunteers are recruited through public information mediums and especially through the society's bi-annual newsletter, which goes out to 1,500 people. *If it was left solely to the Council, none of this restoration and protection work would be done in Centennial Park, or in other bush around the area.* The society is well supported by the Hibiscus and Bays Local Board, with annual financial grants for Centennial Park and other projects that Richard oversees around the area.

Richard is a very involved member of the North Shore branch of Forest and Bird, the fourth largest branch in New Zealand. He joined the committee in 2009 and was elected chair in 2011. He brought a new level of vision, commitment and leadership to the role. Richard introduced a website for the branch, makes

If it was left solely to the Council,
none of this restoration and protection
work would be done in Centennial Park,
or in other bush around the area.

regular submissions to Council on council plans and has given presentations to local boards on the Shore. His submissions have included protecting endangered wildlife from unleashed dogs, action over poorly planned cycle paths, retaining public green spaces, and protecting native bush from development on the Shore. Together with Alan Emmerson, Margi Keys and Claire Stevens, he recently oversaw the completion of the Branch history, which was funded by the late Jim and Ruth Lewis.

‘North Shore is one of New Zealand’s most rapidly growing areas. In-fill housing and subdivision have meant bush destruction and loss of wildlife habitat. The branch, mainly through the work of the late Jim Lewis over many years has had input into mitigating and moderating the effect of development. Subdivision brings with it an influx of cats with their impact on birds and exotic plants such as bangalow palms which are now spreading into bush reserves. Our branch is actively submitting on development proposals which will have a negative impact on the natural environment. As a result, these projects are often disallowed or modified to minimise their environmental footprint.’¹

One significant project for the branch has been planting at Tuff Crater in Northcote, below The Warehouse’s main office building where it adjoins the northern motorway. It is highly visible to those who travel over the Harbour Bridge, commuting to and from the city. Tuff Crater is one of the lesser known craters in the Auckland region, but is now recognised as a tidal mangrove estuary. An area was partially planted in the 2000 Millennium forest plantings and then maintained by the North Shore branch. The remaining area was 90 per cent invasive weeds when Richard was first involved. Under Richard’s leadership, he has encouraged members to take on the restoration of the entire crater area. *I looked at the area and*

said ‘Why don’t we do the rest?’ So we developed a management plan and got some funding, and started doing weed control and planting around the rest of the crater. The Tuff Crater Restoration Project is now a flagship project of the branch. Work on the project has now been sustained over many years by a group of dedicated volunteers. With a project like this we are totally reliant on funding, and you have to have the support from a decent group of volunteers; we have been able to attract good support from local residents. Latest monitoring data suggest rat numbers have plummeted since our volunteer team has been working on the crater, which is excellent news for the native wildlife there.

‘The project has achieved many results: Invasive weeds are reduced to manageable levels, and effective predator control is helping wildlife to thrive. Expert input is helping to raise awareness of the local ecology. An all-weather circuit track allows year round walking, vehicle access for weed control and planting and a pedestrian bridge across the estuary enhances the walking experience.’²

Part of the Forest and Bird mission is working with other groups to achieve common goals. The North Shore branch is working with Auckland Council, Kaipatiki Restoration Network (KRN) and other parties to help reduce the impact of weeds and animal pests on the Shore.

We would like to see a bush care group for every bush reserve on the North Shore. The KRN has been a key tool in achieving this goal. Kaipatiki Ward is a significant piece of the North West Wildlink jigsaw. We’re now looking at a pest free Kaipatiki, which is very much in its infancy, says Richard.

Through the North Shore branch of Forest and Bird, Richard has also worked with Julia Parfitt, chair of the Hibiscus and Bays Local Board, to set up a Hibiscus and Bays Restoration Network;

I always say that unless you
actually know something,
you can’t love it, and if you
don’t love it, you won’t protect it.



this also covers the Hibiscus Forest and Bird Branch area and their Pest Free Peninsula Project. He is also working with the Upper Harbour Ecology Network that is already underway. Together with Alan Emmerson, Margi Keys and Claire Stevens, he recently oversaw the completion of the branch history entitled 'Working together for Nature' (1969–2015) which was funded by the late Jim and Ruth Lewis.

Richard has proposed that the North Shore branch, draft its own strategic plan as a complement to the general strategic plan developed for the Forest and Bird national society. This has generated interest from other branches who are now following suit. *Members can be confident that the next 50 years will continue to see our branch of Forest and Bird doing its bit to give nature a voice,* says Richard.

Richard's dedication to improving his local environment has been publicly recognised. He received the North Shore City Council Civic Award in 2008 for voluntary service to the community, and in 2012, he was awarded the Paul Harris Fellowship by North Harbour Rotary. Richard recognises that there are a number of very good people with expertise in ecology on council and the local boards, but getting them to work together to produce results is another matter. *There are difficulties, in environmental terms, with the structure and intentions of the Council's Unitary Plan, which has little provision for environmental protection and restoration.* He disagrees with the way the Council has carved up the plan into 15 sections each requiring individual submissions. *They're not interested in listening to the people. They want expert witnesses who cost a fortune, making it very difficult for small environmental groups to have a say or influence the outcome.*

Richard has concerns about the broader environmental picture in New Zealand, knowing that it is rapidly deteriorating. *The state of our environment is measured by the Government, and the measurements are going backwards. Some things are improving—we now have more marine reserves, and some species, such as the New*

Zealand dotterel are increasing because of good management. But the quality of our waterways is declining, and that's very concerning because an essential part of being a New Zealander is being able to go to the river and swim. There are places now where there are signs up saying 'Don't Swim.' Richard believes the proposed new Government Fresh Water standard is entirely driven by the needs of intensive agriculture, *and this is destroying our rivers. The new standards say the water only needs to be safe to wade in. That is wrong. Our waterways need to be safe to swim in.*

Looking to the future, Richard is asking us all to look up and look around and get to know our local area, its native plants and birds. *I always say that unless you actually know something, you can't love it, and if you don't love it, you won't protect it.*

1 *Forest and Bird: Giving Nature a Voice. Promoting Environmentally Friendly Development.* <http://www.forestandbird.org.nz/branches/north-shore/north-shore-issues-0>

2 *Forest and Bird: Giving Nature a Voice.* <http://www.forestandbird.org.nz/branches/north-shore/tuff-crater-restoration-project>

3 *Forest and Bird: Giving Nature a Voice.* <http://www.forestandbird.org.nz/branches/north-shore/north-shore-issues-0>



Tou Rourou, toku rourou, ka ora te iwi
With your contribution and my contribution, we will thrive.

— Forest and Bird: Giving Nature a Voice