

# ENCOURAGING WILDLIFE ON GOLF COURSES

## WOODLAND

Many golf courses have quite large areas of woodland within their boundaries. This section of the report looks at ways in which woodland can be managed to promote wildlife.

Woodland must be *managed* in order for a healthy habitat system to be maintained. Even remnants of the "ancient wildwood" (this refers to areas of woodland which have been in existence since 1600) that once covered much of Britain will have been managed: for firewood, timber, building materials etc. It is the decline of traditional woodland management which has led to many woodlands being dominated by older trees, producing a dense canopy which shades out light and so impedes the growth of newer saplings which are necessary for regeneration. Many people cannot understand that it is necessary to manage woodland and that this sometimes involves the felling of trees, as well as the planting of new ones. Such management work should be explained to people: on golf club house notice boards for example.

**ANCIENT WOODLAND** is very important to wildlife because of the continuity of its existence. Plants such as bluebells, wood anemone, dog's mercury and yellow archangel are generally regarded as indicators of ancient woodland. These plants all flower early in the year before the

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leaf canopy develops to shade out the light. The wild service tree, which is rare in the South East, is similarly regarded as an indicator of ancient woodland: it can be found at *Arkley, Pinner, Muswell Hill, and Sundridge Park* golf courses, and possibly several more.

Badgers are a woodland animal that can live safely on golf courses. Sadly there is much abuse of badgers and golf course managers should act as "custodians" of this wonderful creature. A reduction in chemicals designed to destroy worms can help the badger population. Badgers eat large quantities of worms, and if these have been poisoned the badgers might also die.

Where badgers cause problems to greens and fairways advice should be sought from the local Wildlife Trust as has happened at the *Selsdon Park* course with a successful outcome.

Managing woodland means maintaining a full structural range: high canopy, sub-canopy, shrub, field and ground levels. Each component represents a separate mini-habitat supporting a wide range of different species. Together they make up the rich wildlife population of the woodland.

**THE WOODLAND EDGE** is where many flowering plants grow as light is present throughout the year. These areas support many butterflies and birds. Robins, tits, blackbirds and thrushes are common. A good example of sound woodland management can be seen at the *Trent Park* course in Enfield.

On golf courses this area is most under threat as fairways are pushed back, and plants cut down to enable golfers to retrieve their lost golf balls. If this is felt to be necessary it might be possible to create a new woodland edge within the woodland: sometimes this has happened accidentally as ground staff create tracks through the woodland to move maintenance machinery around the course. The opening up of such glades can increase the diversity of species associated with the woodland.

**TREE PLANTING** is generally regarded as good. But thought needs to be given to the species, the location and the grouping of individual trees. Trees planted in lines along the edge of fairways do little to support wildlife and are less visually appealing than small groups or copses. Careful consideration is needed as trees are a recognised part of golf course planning and only minor changes will be needed to significantly improve the wildlife potential of courses.

Before new trees are planted it is sensible to determine what species of trees are growing naturally in particular areas: these are the ones which will be most successful, and additional trees of the same species will be more successful and look visually more satisfactory. Native trees which should be considered, depending upon local conditions are oak, birch, willows, rowan, alder, wild cherry, hazel and hawthorn.

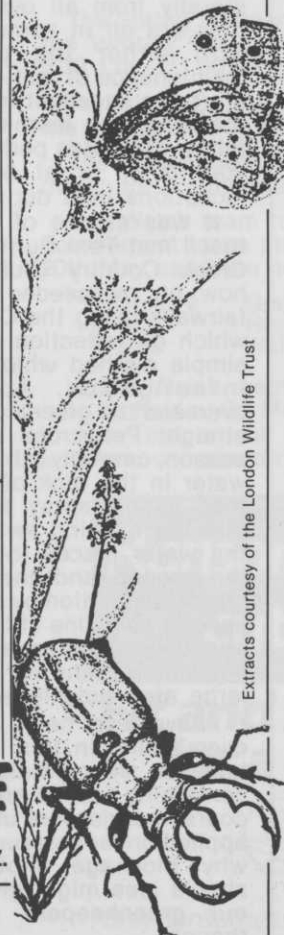
**NATIVE TREES** are recommended in preference to exotic parkland species. The British oak and native willows each support insect communities of over 400 different kinds, and these in turn are a food source for a great many birds and mammals. Sycamores, on the other hand, support only 30 different insects!

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