My involvement with golf course conservation started in June 1992 when I responded on behalf of the club to an offer of a free species study to be carried out on the course. This study was part of a local initiative and the work was duly carried out by the Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT) and paid for jointly by UK2000 and Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH).

It was during the species study that I found out that my knowledge of what was growing on the golf course was virtually non-existent. Merely walking round the course with the surveyors from the SWT I learned a great deal and I quickly became far more interested in finding out more about the local flora and fauna.

The honorary conservation officer at Linlithgow Golf Club at that time was George Anderson who I approached because he was already a member of the SWT. George worked very hard and collected a good proportion of the information required to draw up our management plan.

Unfortunately George retired to Southport but we were again fortunate in finding Crawford Smith who, like George, is a SWT member as well as being a member of the golf club. So with the combined efforts of Gill Smart from the SWT, George Anderson and Karen Morrison of SNH, we have created a conservation management policy for Linlithgow Golf Club which, if carried out correctly, will serve the club for many years to come.

It is interesting to note that the SWT have gained from the experience of working closely with a golf club and some long-held preconceptions have been broken down. It was common, for example, for environmentalists to suppose that golf courses used fertilisers and chemicals in the same manner and quantity as intensive agriculture. I have now been involved with conservation for a little over a year and this time has just been enough for me to become acquainted with the necessary expressions that are commonly used by environmental bodies. For example, a species has various forms of rarity, and although northern marsh orchids may flower in profusion in many parts of the country, this plant may be classed as locally rare if found on your golf course. If it turns out to be the case that these orchids on your golf course are the only ones in a radius of 50 miles then this can count as a source of pride for the club as a whole.

There are many other apparently simple aspects to caring for the environment that will be learned from becoming involved in conservation, but most importantly is the fact that wildlife habitats are disappearing all over the country and golf courses are a potential haven for many apparently ‘common’ forms of wildlife.

It is my opinion that Linlithgow Golf Club is representative of many clubs in Britain and the attitude of our committee to my involvement in conservation may well be similarly representative. Initially the committee only had to grant permission for the survey to take place, but when it became apparent that the club was a potentially important wildlife site the message was one of fear of the power of environmental legislation...*