

Wildlife and Habitat Management

The superintendent as wildlife manager

BY SHELLY FOY

Heavy development in Florida is eliminating living area for many of our birds and animals. The Florida Game and Freshwater Fish Commission's official list of Endangered and Potentially Endangered Species List of June 1, 1994, lists 118 fauna and flora species in Florida as endangered, threatened or vulnerable.

In some locations, golf courses are the last remaining green spaces and their value to wildlife is immeasurable. So not only are golf course superintendents land managers, but wildlife managers as well.

All wildlife need food, water, cover and space to survive. These four combined elements make up an animal's habitat.

How do you manage wildlife?

You provide for their needs; food to keep up energy levels, water to drink and bathe in, cover for breeding, nesting, sleeping, feeding and travel, and space to live and raise their young. The more elements, the more wildlife.

Throughout this article, many ideas and strategies are presented. They may not all be appropriate or needed at your golf course. The important point is that you implement programs you are comfortable with and have the time and energy to accomplish.

Every golf course is different, each idea of management is different. Step back and take a look at the big picture and decide what is right for your golf course and your golfers. Be patient and realistic about your expectations. A well-thought-out plan of action will be appreciated by everyone.

Creating a wildlife inventory

According to the Florida Game & Fresh Water Fish Commission, Florida has 1200 species of animals, which makes us the third most diverse state in the nation. Golf courses in Florida also have the opportunity to provide a valuable resting and feeding stop for migrating birds, as the East Coast is along the Atlantic Flyway.



Habitat Elements

- Conifers
- Grasses and legumes
- Hummingbird plants
- Summer plants
- Fall plants
- Winter plants
- Nut & acorn
- Feeders
- Water
- Dust beds & grit
- Salt
- Brush and rock piles
- Tree snags
- Nestboxes
- Cut banks, cliffs & caves
- Butterfly, bee & moth plants

A wildlife inventory can provide you with information such as what species are on-site, nesting and feeding information, as well as if your course is being used as a migration stop. Also, without knowing what species you have on your site, deciding what programs will be best for your course will be difficult. An ongoing inventory will help you to document the success of the enhancement projects you are implementing.

Ideas:

◆ Post a large-scale map of your facility which lists as much detail as possible (buildings, plant material, lakes, etc.). Have a journal or log under the map where golfers can note date, location, species and any other pertinent information. For golfer convenience, try locating this journal near where they post scores.

◆ Create a wildlife library in your proshop or clubhouse where members can "check out" books on wildlife. Have a journal or log where sightings can be registered. As an educational tool, have a

board where you can highlight a different wildlife species each month, or educate members/golfers of the benefits of certain management practices, (snags, naturalization, etc...)

◆ Create a card (part of your scorecard maybe) which has pictures of the most common wildlife species on your golf course and a title that says, "Have you seen me today?" Even golfers who are not familiar with names of species can recognize them with a picture. Provide a few lines where they can note where they saw them and anything special that they observed.

◆ Take the time to educate your staff on the wildlife present on the course. Have a journal or log in the maintenance building where they can note sightings.

◆ Invite a local bird group, scout group, high school or college biology class to help you create an inventory, perhaps on a day the golf course is closed. Schools are always looking for new ways to interest students in learning.