

Managing Endangered and Threatened Species

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Photo by The Nature Conservancy

Curious scrub jays will often land on carts and check out the golfers.

BY GREG PHENEGER
GOLF COURSE MANAGER
JOHN'S ISLAND WEST

The West Golf Course at John's Island Club is maintained in a very natural state. While this plays havoc with errant golf shots, it is a haven for wildlife.

The course was built on a natural sand dune with the holes on the eastern boundary running along a wetland area. The vegetation includes but is not limited to live oaks, scrub oaks, sand pines, slash pines, hickory, sabal palms and saw palmettos. At one time, paths were cut

through the vegetation to facilitate speed of play. These areas have been revegetated with native material.

All noxious vegetation is currently removed by two full-time and two part-time crew members. The noxious material is removed very selectively by hand so we do not disturb any nesting sites or food sources. We have begun a major revamping of the irrigation system around the greens to reduce or eliminate the radium of water thrown into the woods to lessen the growth of noxious vegetation. After the work around the greens is completed, the irrigation project will move to the tees, then fairways.

The course is home or a food source to many threatened species of wildlife. A bald eagle regularly fishes the pond at #18. The eagle's nest is on property adjacent to the course that is owned by John's Island but has been turned over to the county for a wildlife habitat.

Another threatened species is the scrub jay, which is very popular among members and crew. The major spot for locating them is along holes 3 and 4.

We protect the scrub jay by protecting their habitat. They prefer isolated sandy areas with low vegetation, preferably scrub oak and saw palmettos, which is the primary vegetation of John's Island West.

They are very popular due to their unique nesting habits. A breeding pair's nest is attended not only by the pair, but by other jays as well. They help feed the young, keep the nest clean and guard against other jays and predators. The same helpers tend to stay with the nest at least one to two years.

The popularity of the scrub jay has increased due to the helpers' inquisitiveness. A cart with golfers sitting fairly still will attract them to land very close. They will stand on the roof and peer under to get a good look and slowly inch right up to you.

Our membership takes great pride not only in the golf course condition, but in trying to do our best to cooperate with nature and protect the habitat, both for golf and nature.

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