

Tree Snags: Birds Love Them

"You're going to leave that dead tree standing by the green on No. 15! Are you crazy?"

No, you are not crazy. You are providing a source for over 22 Florida birds, not to mention other wildlife species who depend on "snags" for a place to nest, eat, sleep and raise a family.

What is a snag? A snag is a dead or partially dead tree that is left standing. Snags are valuable resources to many species of wildlife. Something for you to think about, is that more than one third of forest dwelling birds and mammals require a hole or cavity for nesting and shelter. Insects are attracted to the dying wood and lay their eggs, which in turn attract such birds as woodpeckers and nuthatches. A plus for golfers is that many of the bird species that call snags home are insect eaters.



Ospreys often build their nests in snags, such as these at Tampa Palms G&CC.



Snag heaven at Summerfield GC!

Unless a snag is a threat to safety, such as adjacent to the cart path, or in danger of limbs being blown off and falling on someone, let it be. You might receive a complaint or two. If so, take the opportunity to educate your members or golfers about the value of snags. Try reprinting a snag article in your club newsletter or posting information in the clubhouse or pro shop.

The next time you are having a shade problem and need to do some selective thinning, have root invasion problems, wind or lightning damages a tree, try a little something called "girdling".

Simply remove a 4-inch-wide band of outer and inner barks around the trunk of a tree 6 to 20 inches in diameter. Make sure the cut goes at least one inch below the bark to cut off flow of food and water between the roots and leaves. The tree will eventually die, leaving a snag to help increase the population of cavity nesting birds and mammals.

What makes a good or a bad snag?

Good snags should have decayed heartwood at the right height for a cavity. Obviously, diseased trees or trees infested with pine bark beetles should be removed and taken from the property. Outer sapwood rot with healthy interior heartwood is also bad, it's hard to excavate and shallow nests are more at risk to predators.

If you have a snag and want to help create a cavity, drill a 2-inch-diameter hole into the heartwood about 3 inches below stout limbs so that the openings point downward to provide protection from rain as well as predators.

Once a snag falls to the ground and it's not in the way, leave it there because it continues to be beneficial to wildlife as well as returns important nutrients to the soil.



Cavity-dwelling birds are attracted to snags at Colliers Reserve.