

# Management Programs at an Audubon Signature course

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**O**n December 12, 1994, The Champions Club at Summerfield, located in Stuart, became the first public golf course to be certified as an Audubon Signature Cooperative Sanctuary. The Tom Fazio-designed course is 6800 yards long and a definite challenge from the back tees.

Yet, from the middle and forward tees, it is a fair test for the average golfer. The golf course is routed through 300 acres of "point of no return" marshlands. With over 100 acres of maintained turf, including four acres of greens and 40 acres of fairways, the course has generous lay-out areas with strategically placed multi-tiered greens. Most of the holes are bordered by wetlands and are maintained so as not to disturb the sensitive wildlife habitat.

Being a public golf facility as well as an Audubon Signature member creates a challenge. Participation in the Signature Program does not end with Signature designation. There is an ongoing effort to upgrade the golf course and to implement new projects and technologies.

## Enhancement of Wildlife Habitat

No mechanical devices of any type are used in the wetlands. We hand pull all unwanted plants such as dog fennel, primrose, Brazilian pepper, and melaleuca. They are replaced with natural and native vegetation such as cord grass and flame grass. This not only cleans up the wetlands, but aids in making homes for some of our host animals. This work also adds definition to all holes, and the golfers enjoy seeing just how true and peaceful a wetland can be.

In an effort to attract as many species of birds as possible, we have placed bird houses as far as 75 yards into the marsh. We estimate our present list of observed species at over 100. This includes bald eagle, king fisher, great blue heron, osprey, sandhill crane, quail, red-tailed hawk, great egret, and ibis.

In addition to birds, fox, deer, raccoons, hogs and even a horse or two may be seen on the course. All of the wildlife adds enjoyment and contentment to the golfing experience at Summerfield.

## IPM Management

Golfers and wildlife can feel safe and secure knowing that an Integrated Pest Management program is practiced at Summerfield. Some weeds are allowed to grow in order to preserve natural features, especially near wetlands.

Rain days turn into hand-pulling weed days when the course is too wet to mow. This not only reduces the need for herbicides, but dwindles the weed population to eventually make a weed-free golf course.

Insect populations are monitored and scouted and only sprayed when damage is extensive. A short-lived, no-residual chemical such as Orthene is used to prevent leaching into ponds or wetlands.

Using a biological control for nematode hot spots has worked very well. A preemergent herbicide is applied once a year to help control most annual weeds.

Another practice used is the application of Primo growth retardant. Primo is



*The golf is routed through 300 acres of "point of no return" wetlands. A wood stork (an endangered species) forages the wetlands.*

used on tees, collars and fairways and helps reduce thatch and clippings. Buckets are not used when mowing tees, collars and fairways so that we have nothing to dispose of except clippings from greens. Using Primo allows us to skip mow on hot, wet summer days.

With a small crew of eight, this means a lot. Aeration, scalping of fairways and a good fertility program allow us to have tightly manicured fairways all year long.

Almost 75% to 80% of our fertilizer is slow-release. This is not only good for the environment, but helps us control growth without receiving too much growth at once. It also helps control leaching into wetlands and other areas.

## Water Practices and Irrigation

The entire Summerfield development and The Champions Club are on a low energy- and water-usage program.



*"We estimate our present list of observed species at over 100. . ." A flock of white ibis at Summerfield is pictured above.*

Monitoring of piezometers on our course and the entire project takes a great deal of time. Monitoring wetlands depth and pump management tables is required. Our wetlands have gone up by 3 feet and down to bone dry during the last year.

Our Rain-Bird Maxi 5 irrigation system is a great asset to our course. This system allows us to put out the exact amount of water needed with as little waste as possible.

Irrigation heads are finely tuned to water only areas of turfgrass. Water is not spewed into wetlands or onto cart paths. Various nozzles are installed to lengthen or to shorten water sprays and insure turf quality without harming any natural vegetation.

Using wetting agents over the entire golf course helps conserve and limit the amount of water applied on our project. These wetting agents are applied through a liquid fertigation system so that mechanical spraying and golfer disruptions are not required.



*This raccoon family adds enjoyment to the golfing experience at Summerfield.*



*From Bald Eagle to Quail (above), all wildlife benefits from Summerfield's Integrated Pest Management Program.*

## Public Awareness and Involvement

Understanding wildlife and how habitat enhancement helps populations increase will help the general public and our golfers to know why we do some of the things we do at Summerfield. We have adopted three local schools into our sanctuary program. Educating children as well as adults about wildlife through tours, educational workshops and enhancement projects can only benefit everyone.