Starting in Our Own Backyards

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A few years ago when John and I first started becoming involved in the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses, we felt it was important to "practice what we preached." So we started in our own backyard.

The Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary System has programs for golf courses, schools, corporate and business properties, as well as a program for back yards. We felt that if we were going to be encouraging people to go through the certification process, we needed to better understand what was involved.

We joined the backyard program in 1994 as a family project. In 1995, we became the first fully certified Audubon Backyard Sanctuary in the program. Going through the certification process in our own backyard gave us a better understanding of Audubon and the certification process.

In the backyard program, there are four categories: Wildlife and Habitat Management, Water Enhancement and Conservation, Energy Conservation, and Waste Management.

The certification process is similar to the golf program. You fill out a Resource Inventory for your property, and then you work toward certification in the categories.

John, Hunter, Elizabeth and I found the entire process to be educational and fun. I know that John and I learned a lot, and the effect on our children does not go unnoticed.

Our 11-year-old son, Hunter, will not
tell you to look at the bird in the tree. He
tells you to look at the red-bellied wood-
pecker in the slash pine tree. Elizabeth,
who just turned 10, becomes upset be-
cause she thinks her brother knows more
about birds than she does.

However, this is the same child that
could name more Florida birds than the
majority of us. They know about recy-
cling and composting and the impor-
tance of saving water. They could prob-
ably write their own book about butter-
fly gardening and using native plants.

Yes, we hear them complain occa-
sionally about working in the yard and
yes, Hunter tells me to forget about him
joining the “Weed Whacker” club at
middle school next year.

However, we also see them turning
the water off instead of letting it run
when they brush their teeth. We note
that they are the first ones to tell us that
the painted buntings are at one of the
bird feeders. We feel good when Eliza-
beth notices that the bird feeders are
empty and refills them on her own.

John and I like that our family cares
about nature and the environment and
that we do our part to protect it. We do it,
not because someone tells us to or re-
minds us to, but because we want to.

As golf course superintendents, be-
coming involved with the backyard pro-
gram is a way to involve your families in
something that you do every day — work
with nature. You could also use the back-
yard program as an educational tool with
your golfers or course officials.

Call Audubon at (518) 767-9051 and
ask them to send you some backyard
brochures. Share these with people at
your golf course. Make it a friendly com-
petition among friends to see who be-
comes certified first. The cost is $35, $25
for seniors.

Our family encourages yours to be-
come involved in the backyard program.
Make it a family project and spend some
time bonding with each other and with
nature.


This oak tree snag in the Jackson
backyard in Orlando became a home for
a pair of red bellied woodpeckers this
spring. Photo by Joel Jackson.