

# Birds, Not Birdies, Count on North America's Golf Courses

By Jean Mackay

Volunteer birdwatchers recently turned up 295 different species of birds on golf courses participating in Audubon International's 2002 North American Birdwatching Open. During the 24-hour event, 48 golf courses that are participating in the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary and Audubon Signature Programs recorded as many different bird species as they could to provide a snapshot of bird activity on golf courses at the height of bird migration in May. Audubon International encourages courses to play an active role in conserving habitat for birds and protecting overall environmental quality.

Eagles Landing Golf Course in Berlin, Md. sighted 92 different bird species during the day to record the highest number of species for the third year running. Birders at Lake Quivira Golf Course in Kansas sighted 78 species and Turning Stone Casino Resort in New York came away with 76 species, to place second and third respectively. Among this year's leading courses were prior top performers The Club at Seabrook Island in South Carolina (75 species) and Michigan's Gull Lake View Golf Club (71 species). Joining them for the first time this year was Oak

Meadow Country Club in Missouri with 74 species.

"The results of the North American Birdwatching Open show that it's not just the size of the property that counts, but the variety of habitats present and the way natural areas are managed that make a difference," said Jean Mackay, director of educational services for Audubon International. The diversity of species overall and the number of birds recorded per site reflect both the geographical spread of golf courses across North America and the wide range of habitats found on and around these sites. Fifty-six percent of participants identified 50 or more species, while 14 percent counted fewer than 30.

Data from this year's event proved to be highly consistent with data gathered since the event was first held in 1998. The top twenty-five birds sighted remained nearly unchanged. Mourning doves, blue jays, and red-winged blackbirds topped the list of birds sighted. From there, the inventory of birds gets more interesting, with sightings of great blue heron and red-bellied woodpecker on nearly 75 percent of partici-

pating courses and eastern bluebird and green heron on 52 percent.

In addition, seven federally threatened and endangered species were sighted. Fifteen courses spotted loggerhead shrikes, eight courses recorded sandhill cranes, and six courses identified American bald eagles. Other endangered/threatened species included least tern, brown pelican, grasshopper sparrow, and clapper rail.

"In the end, the greatest challenge of the North American Birdwatching Open is not in counting the most birds, but in calling all golf courses to take account of wildlife and other environmental aspects of management," said Mackay. "When properly managed, golf courses can make a valuable contribution to the rich diversity of avian species across North America."

Audubon International is a not-for-profit 501 (c)(3) environmental organization dedicated to improving the quality of the environment, with an emphasis on helping people become actively involved in good environmental stewardship and sustainable resource management.

The organization was established in 1987 to find ways to address environmental problems by working cooperatively, and in partnership with, a diverse array of organizations and individuals to improve environmental quality on the lands they manage.

#### On the Web

<http://www.audubonintl.org>

#### STEWARDSHIP NOTES

## It's Time to Walk the Talk

By Shelly Foy

I already miss summer. Not the hot, humid days where you feel that you can hardly breathe when you step outside; but the slower pace of it. No fighting teenagers to get them off to school, no volunteering at schools for a couple of months, and the "slower" season in our office when most of the members are up North somewhere and superintendents are busy with summer projects and renovations. We actually have time to catch up a little and even take some time to head to



A flock of cedar waxwings finds sanctuary at the Willoughby G&CC over the winter. Photo by Bob Smith.



our favorite mountain in North Carolina.

But alas, those days are over, and my to-do list is so, so long. Just in this one week of late August, I have to finish this article for the *Florida Green* (hopefully on time for a change), plan a program for two regional conferences, work on trying to schedule four Audubon workshops in the same week, in season, work on the budget for our office, plan the first Audubon committee meeting for the elementary school, start working on an Audubon talk for the SFGCSA and wonder why in the world I agreed to help raise money for my daughter's high-school sailing team. This on top of mom duties of carpooling, grocery shopping, cooking, cleaning and dragging teenagers out of bed at 6 a.m. Sound familiar to anyone?

What's my point? We all have busy lives. I don't know anyone who has a 9-to-5 job anymore. We are all spread too thin, but somehow all these to-do things seem important. Well, I am going to ask each of you to add one more important thing to your to-do lists: Attend an Audubon Workshop closest to you the first week in December.

This series of Audubon Workshops will be sponsored by the FGCSA and the USGA, and will be at various locations in Florida. David Court, president of the FGCSA, thinks the ACSP is important enough to make this one of the things he promotes during his presidency. Joel Jackson's recent government-relations experiences makes him think it's critical so he spends lot of time e-mailing all of the chapters to promote the workshops. I think it is important enough to tackle organizing it.

So, David, Joel and I are hoping that you will all make an effort to attend the ACSP workshop closest to you. The plan is to have Audubon staff take everyone through the first certification steps, the Site Assessment and the Environmental Plan. We will provide everyone with a list beforehand of the important information to bring with you. When you leave this workshop, you will have completed the first certification step.

### ASCP Florida Survey Results

I have been curious for a long time about what makes golf courses become so committed to the ACSP. I decided to send a survey to all 59 certified ACSP golf courses in Florida and ask a few questions about how they feel about the ACSP. I was encouraged by the responses and thought that maybe you might heed some advice from your peers. If you are not a member, join; and if you are one of those who just keep sending in your registration fee and never do anything, maybe some of the following responses will get you fired up. We don't have the space to list every answer to the following questions, so author's choice is the name of the game.

#### How has going through the ACSP certification process been beneficial to you personally?

"It has provided me a tool to use for public relations and education of others unfamiliar with the benefits golf courses provide to the environment, community and to each of us as individuals. It has allowed me to look beyond what I currently know and expand my knowledge of the diverse environment that I manage."

*Darren Davis, Olde Florida Golf Club*

"Answering the certification questionnaire forced me to pay more attention to the many different species that inhabit a golf course, from animals, birds and fish to plant life. The water-quality issues were especially enlightening. I had not really understood the science involved or the complexity of the ecosystem until I started trying to answer the questions."

*Nancy Miller, Maple Leaf Golf & Country Club*  
(Although Nancy is new to Maple Leaf, she has worked on Audubon certification at three locations previously.)

"The educational process of learning how golf courses and maintenance can affect the environment has been beneficial to me. It has also allowed me the opportunity to teach others, and to be able to clarify in better detail the public relations dilemma of why golf courses are not hazardous to the environment."

*Scott MacEwen, TPC of Tampa Bay*

"I have never looked at it as a personal achievement. However, I did find it rewarding to see the changes in the views of the members and guests, resulting in a greater respect for the environment."

*Mark Metzger, Arrowhead Golf Course*

#### How has going through the ACSP certification process been beneficial to your golf course?

"We now use a lot of natural fertilizers and pesticides. It is a good feeling when members notice the results we are achieving."

*Jeff Klontz, Country Club of Florida*

"The process has helped to remove areas from cultural practices, i.e., mowing, and helped to decrease labor and chemical expense in those areas."

*Walter Wells, Habitat at Valkaria*

"We have seen major reductions in the amount of fertilizers, pesticides and water use."

*Bob Volpe, Pelican's Nest Golf Course*

"The certification process brings together many different people on the course. The superintendent, manager and members all work together for a common goal and get to know and understand each other better. Being involved in the process brings a sense of pride to all the participants. The certification is also a good marketing and public relations tool."

*Nancy Miller, Maple Leaf Golf & Country Club*  
"We were able to naturalize some areas, which saved some labor. We in turn utilize this labor to keep up with our native plantings and butterfly gardens. Many of the native plantings have made many areas more aesthetically pleasing to our guests."

*Scott Welder, Walt Disney World - Lake Buena Vista Course*

#### What is the difference in just being a member of the ACSP and being certified in the program?

"I feel the biggest difference is the level of involvement. The certification process unites the entire community, and the lasting effects of this union will continue for the life of the club."

*Mark Metzger, Arrowhead Golf Course*

"Being certified has increased the awareness of our membership on the importance of maintaining our natural habitats."

*Cindy and Danny Claude, Lemon Bay Golf Club*

"Fully certified signifies more than just an interest in

doing the right thing. It shows a willingness to commit to a completed task and walking the walk, not just talking the talk."

*Darren Davis, Olde Florida Golf Club*

"The difference is total commitment to environmental stewardship. Being just a member of the program ensures that you are aware and involved in the environmental process. Having attained full certification means that you have gone through the entire process, established policies and procedures to attain certification, and allowed the process to be totally implemented - in a way, a move to organizational commitment."

*Garth Boline, Chi Chi Rodriguez Golf Course*

#### Was there a specific problem or concern that participation in the ACSP helped solve? (For example, using the education information to promote increased naturalization for habitat) <-

"I think it adds a platform to be able to get things accomplished. Most members are not aware that the program exists. Being involved in the program has also helped get items in the budget."

*Matt Taylor, Royal Poinciana Golf Club*

"Yes, it helps our members understand why the way we manage the course has a direct impact on how well we co-exist with wildlife. They also now understand that lush, green grass is not always healthy for the environment."

*Pete Metcalf, Wyndemere Country club*

"Our homeowners around the course use the same irrigation source as we do and there has been a constant debate over water quality. The documentation that comes with certification has calmed these concerns."

*Mark Metzger, Arrowhead Golf Course*

"Re-emphasis on no-spray zones around the lakes of the course."

*Bob Haley, Hammock Dunes*

"The naturalization of lake-bank areas was far easier to put to the golfing public through the literature provided and helped get resources for the project."

*Walter Wells, Habitat at Valkaria*

"Our golf course is in an urban area and loss of habitat has been a great concern for our golf course. By using the educational guidelines to provide additional natural habitat, plant-food sources, replace aquatic plantings and provide a nesting box and feeding station program, we have greatly increased the wildlife population on our golf course."

*Garth Boline, Chi Chi Rodriguez Golf Course*

"There are many concerns or problems that come up on a regular basis that are usually abated by the fact that we are a participant of the ACSP. For instance, if I receive feedback from a member concerning our handling of pesticides or other chemicals, it is so much easier to convince them that things are OK by explaining that the ACSP teaches and requires proper BMPs and IPM techniques."

*Russ Geiger, Hole-in-the-Wall Golf Club*

#### What tips can you give others going through the certification process?

"Get as many people involved as possible so that not only does this lighten the amount of paperwork, but it also gets the rest of your staff to marry into the program from the beginning."

*Matt Taylor, Royal Poinciana Golf Club*

"Once you get started, don't stop. Keep plugging away at it, and seek help from others if you need it."

*Buddy Keene, Gainesville Golf & Country Club*

"Be patient, yet stay focused on completing the process. Stay dedicated to the program and you will see benefits. Audubon staff is extremely helpful; use them, they are there to help."

*Jim Moore, TPC at Eagle Trace*

"Don't be intimidated by the paperwork! Just do it! Take lots of pictures. It is a great learning experience."

*Nancy Miller, Maple Leaf Golf & Country Club*

"Remain focused. Just getting started is the hardest obstacle to overcome."

*Walter Wells, Habitat at Valkaria*

"Involve your employees and members."

*Tim Cann, Harbour Ridge Golf & Country Club*

"Just do it - You will be glad you did. It provides more positives than negatives."

*Bob Volpe, Pelican's Nest Golf Club*

"You can maintain the golf course at the same level while still becoming certified."

*David Tandy, TPC at Eagle Trace*

"Buy a digital camera, photos are a tremendous help."

*Pete Metcalf, Wyndemere Country Club*

"Make it fun! Get everyone involved in the process from the start. You will be surprised by the enhancement of the relationships you have with all participants."

*Mark Metzger, Arrowhead Golf Course*

"Work a timetable and complete one section at a time. Don't overload yourself with projects, and realize that it is an on-going plan."

*Cindy and Danny Claude, Lemon Bay Golf Club*

"As Nike says, 'Just do it.'"

*Darren Davis, Olde Florida Golf Club*

"Keep your certification materials on your desk, in front of you, so you don't put it aside and never complete it!"

*Alan Bakos, The Moorings Country Club of Naples*

"Once you get started, you won't want to quit. Network with your peers. Keep good records - you will need to recertify every two years."

*Scott Welder, Walt Disney World - Lake Buena Vista Course*

"Surround yourself with interested people to help with the process."

*Scott MacEwen, TPC of Tampa Bay*

"Involve all the golf course staff and surrounding community in the program. Make sure information on program success stories gets to everyone."

*Garth Boline, Chi Chi Rodriguez Golf Course*

"Hang in there and take it step by step. The benefits will be worth every minute. Also, don't hesitate to ask interested members for a hand in completing certain tasks. I have found more than one member who has gladly helped out."

*Russ Geiger, Hole-in-the-Wall Golf Club*

### Why should golf courses be involved in the ACSP?

"It is the perfect opportunity to make your course a better place. The teamwork it promotes is a huge benefit. Finally, the message of co-existence with nature and enhancement of wildlife is very important in today's world."

*Mark Metzger, Arrowhead Golf Course*

"It brings an emphasis to environmental enhancement and preservation to the members. It establishes a project that members can rally around. It is a positive experience."

*Bob Haley, Hammock Dunes*

"We live in a prove-yourself environment. Golf course superintendents need to get the word out how great golf course properties are for people and wildlife."

*Tim Cann, Harbour Ridge Golf & Country Club*

"The benefits to the environment, course aesthetics through the influx of wildlife, and the overall benefits to the ecosystem surrounding and throughout the golf course is reason in itself."

*Walter Wells, Habitat at Valkaria*

"The benefits are immeasurable. The involvement helps the community to understand that golf courses are able to enhance and protect the environment."

*Cindy and Danny Claude, Lemon Bay Golf Club*

"The process increases morale of your staff, members and guests. The ACSP can be used to promote your course in the community and enhance marketing efforts for membership and home sales. The ACSP increases awareness of your natural surroundings and helps preserve a wide array of native species: animal, vegetable and mineral. Besides, it just makes you feel good!"

*Nancy Miller, Maple Leaf Golf & Country Club*

"Because it is truly the right thing to do. Strength is in numbers. There are not just a few good golf courses; we all do positive things that may need to be tweaked just a little to become even better stewards of the environment. Again, we must be seen 'walking the walk,' NOT just 'talking the talk.'"

*Darren Davis, Olde Florida Golf Club*

"To educate the uneducated."

*Bob Volpe, Pelican's Nest Golf Course*

"Golf courses should be involved in the ACSP for many reasons, but in a nutshell, there is strength in numbers. The more golf courses we have certified in the program, the less outside groups can 'cherry pick' courses that are not. It also gives superintendents a forum to showcase the efforts we make on a daily basis."

*Matt Taylor, Royal Poinciana Golf Club*

"We are all aware of the multitude of challenges that we face from ongoing environmental regulation and how it governs what we can and can't do with respect to golf course maintenance practices. Being involved in the ACSP places you on the leading edge of confronting these issues and gives you a firm position in defending the fact that golf courses can and do lead the way in conservation of the environment and its natural resources. It basically (and boldly) states that we are taking very serious care in what we are doing."

*Russ Geiger, Hole-in-the-Wall Golf Club*

"It is an easy way to document and show the public that golf and the environment can be harmonious."

*Scott Welder, Walt Disney World - Lake Buena Vista Course*

"It shows the community that we are professional and are genuinely concerned about the environment."

*Alan Bakos, The Moorings Country Club of Naples*

"If for no other reason, to increase your knowledge base and thereby solidify the professionalism we all

strive to achieve."

*Pete Metcalf, Wyndemere Country Club*

"Because it is a great avenue to show that we do care and that we are environmental stewards."

*Buddy Keene, Gainesville Golf & Country Club*

"The ACSP gives each club the opportunity to promote environmental and agronomic programs to its members and the community. It will help to give the club direction and planning, as well as broaden their awareness toward the environment. Golf courses will have the opportunity to focus on environmental stewardship and make improvements to their golf course that benefits everyone. There is no reason not to be involved."

*Jim Moore, TPC at Eagle Trace*

And that folks is the rest of the story. Shelly Foy signing off and saying I would really like to see as many of you as possible attending these Audubon Workshops!

For information about the author, see inside cover.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### Do you have to be a member of the ACSP to attend?

No. We would hope that everyone interested in the program attends. We believe that after you have gotten through the first step and see that the new certification format is not all that time-consuming, you will be excited about joining the program.

### What if I have already completed step one in the certification process. Will the workshop still be of benefit to me?

Yes. We will be going through every certification category and will give you specific information and ideas for those categories that you are still working on.

### My course is already fully certified. Why should I attend?

We are encouraging all fully certified golf courses to attend and share information about your ACSP program. We would like for you to be on hand to help others by working one-on-one to fill out forms. Also, since fully certified golf courses have to re-certify every two years, there should be plenty of idea sharing with programs and projects you may want to implement on your golf course.

### Will there be any CEU's available for attending?

We will be applying for any credits that we can get.

### I completed my Environmental Plan in 1999. Do I need to attend this workshop?

Audubon updated the certification process last year, and the new forms are designed to be less time-consuming. Any golf course that has submitted an Environmental Plan prior to 1/1/02 will have to re-submit with the new forms. Bring your old forms with you and we will help you get updated.