

Is the ACSP Program Taking Root?

What Members and Golfers Think About the Audubon Sanctuary Program.

By Shelly Foy

I am often asked “How do we get our members/golfers involved in our environmental stewardship efforts?”

I surveyed Audubon Committee members of several golf courses in Florida and asked three questions. I would like to thank John Axe, Bud Smart, Susan Pratt, Jack Kreager, Susan Cassell, Leo Larkin, and Ed McCoy for their thoughtful responses to the questions. Their answers have encouraged me and should encourage you as well.

What are the reasons you decided to become involved with the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program (ACSP) at your golf course?

- Participation encourages our mem-

bers to see beyond the golf course and learn to focus and appreciate the “Gulf” course community of wildlife with which we share this beautiful location.

- We are surrounded by a federal wildlife refuge and have long practiced environmentally friendly management. Many of our members are active in local environmental groups.

- Florida is suffering from drought-related water shortages. When people have watering restrictions on their own lawns, they get understandably testy with the water being “lavished” on golf courses. The ACSP program can help golfers dispel the idea that golf courses are not eco-friendly.

- I am deeply concerned about environmental issues. Wildlife is a key interest to many of us who live here. We value the birds, wildcat, coyotes, even our four alligators. Also, golf courses

will be at peril if we don’t deal with water issues. Ours is the first in Citrus County to get grey water.

- I belong to National Audubon and work as a volunteer at Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary. The Audubon people always give golf courses a bum rap. I have argued with them and have even invited them to look at our golf course, but they have a mindset that golf courses are bad, using too much water, fertilizer, pesticides, etc. I felt differently and knew that our course was a great place, abundant with wildlife, and very environmentally friendly. As chairman of the Audubon Committee I have tried to educate the members through our monthly column in the newsletter and on our Web site about the standards we meet to keep our certification. Our membership appreciates the efforts of our superintendent and the entire main-

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tenance staff in keeping us certified.

- It is a deep-seeded appreciation for nature and the beauty of species, a desire to play a role in shaping our tomorrow, a way of saying thank you for the great environment we live and play in. It is a way of being a part of something that is very special, a way of learning more about our world by working with our neighbors and people responsible for our course maintenance. It is simply a means by which we help to make this a better world.

- Before our superintendent came here, we had not been aware of the Audubon program. However, he had successfully completed certification at his previous course, and after he presented the information to the board of directors and green committee, we were quickly excited to commence the process. Soon after that, he organized wildlife tours that were a huge success. That first year, almost 100 members were shown highlights of the course from a different perspective, and that program continues today, six years later.

What value do you feel the ACSP has added to your golf course membership and to your golfing experience?

- Motivation... there are many golf communities but very few with a genuine and primary focus on combining the beauty of nature with the wildlife inhabitants so as to improve the living experience of both as we enjoy a round of golf. Certification is hard to achieve but worth the effort.

- It has helped raise member aware-

ness of the value of conservation practices. I'm not sure that the course, *per se*, is more beautiful as a result, but we feel better about it.

- The golfers take more interest in the wildlife and have more interest in protecting them and learning about their behaviors and habitats. We have raised quail to reintroduce them to the course; we have put up over 100 blue-bird boxes made by a member; we take evening rides and walks to check on the baby alligators; members have stocked the ponds and fish in them; turtle platforms have been put in the ponds, made by members. Money has also been donated for trees.

Many facilities struggle with how to get their members and golfers involved in environmental projects. What advice could you offer other courses on how to encourage participation in environmental stewardship projects?

- Our members are really into wildlife, and having the certification encourages their interest.

- Participation must start with leadership and communication. Our superintendent is committed to the process and his enthusiasm is captivating. With knowledgeable and informed leadership by management and membership, an ever-expanding vision of "what could be" soon becomes "what is." A round of golf becomes more than 18 holes. It's an opportunity to spend four hours in a truly unique environment with expanded horizons and visual experiences that enhances the adventure. This

is especially true if one is an amateur golfer... and we all are!

- We have a kayaking group with over 60 members. I provide information on the area birds and initiatives to protect endangered species. The community made a large contribution to a fund to save 3 Sisters Springs that harbor manatees in the winter. We bring in naturalists, Audubon Society members, and members with special knowledge to share. This all translates to a wider environmental consciousness that has supported the initiative. We also made a commitment to this project as a key item on the interview process for a new golf course superintendent. He has been a terrific asset to the program.

- Perhaps there should be an increase in exposure in magazines that golfers read, who will then encourage the superintendent to undertake the certification process. Marketing in superintendent magazines is not enough. Almost all superintendents are aware of the Audubon program; they probably just need a little encouragement from their membership to get started.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: Audubon International recently released a report called "Golf's Green Bottom Line: Uncovering the Hidden Business Value of Environmental Stewardship on Golf Courses." This report clearly documents a business value associated with environmental stewardship on golf courses. You can download this report at <http://auduboninternational.org/PDFs/GolfsGreenBottomLine2009.pdf>.



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