

Heat, drought tax Texas and the South; humidity adds to Ga. woes

By MARK LESLIE

GRIFFIN, Ga. — Extensive fires have avoided states outside Florida, but drought, triple-digit temperatures and high humidity are plaguing golf courses across the South.

"Excessive high temperatures and high humidity are the threats in Georgia," Patrick O'Brien, director of the Southeast Region of the U.S. Golf Association (USGA) Green Section.

In Texas, where it has been hot and dry, the USGA's Jim Moore said: "What everybody is so worried about is that the heat started so early. We usually have a hot stretch of weather, but usually not until August. The biggest concern is that we have 60 days of it left."

Green Section South Central Region agronomist Brian Malloy even nighttime and soil temperatures are staying above 80 degrees, not allowing the turf canopy to cool.

Poa annua greens were "the first to check out" in Texas, Malloy said. And O'Brien said from Georgia that bentgrass greens, especially on courses without heat-tolerant cultivars, are in trouble in many areas.

"Our water tables are in good shape for the most part," O'Brien said. "But we have many areas that have already had 15 to 20 days over 100 degrees."

To remedy the situation, O'Brien said, superintendents are installing fans at sites with poor air circulation.

"I'm seeing clubs pulling lots of electric wire onto sites now if they don't already have fans up. They might have been able to survive the last two summers with those [non-heat-tolerant] bents, but not this year."

"Tree-pocked sites have the most problems," he said. "We have so much humidity that syringing is not done. What cools the grass is keeping evapotranspiration working."

Malloy said many Texas superintendents are installing fans as well — the 5-horsepower models that move a far greater volume of air than the 1-hp fans. He pointed out that research indicates that canopy temperatures can be decreased 15 degrees with a 4-mile-per-hour breeze.

Push-up-style greens are the first to show stress, Malloy said. "If they have inadequate surface drainage, they are the first to go. And also the ones with no subsurface drainage, or internal drainage."

Moore pointed to the importance of water. Irrigation systems are designed according to the average annual rainfall, he said. "When we get this far away from that average, you will see deficiencies in the coverage. To

compensate for that it means a lot more daytime watering and golfers have to put up with that.

"Agronomically, you will see a real split between how bentgrass greens survive."

For superintendents who have good water quality, a drought puts the superintendent in total control of how much water the

greens receive.

For superintendents who have poor-quality water, this drought is a serious problem, and in some towns nobody has decent water quality, Moore said. "They need the flushing rains of good pure water. When you don't get that to flush the salts out, it is a real tough deal."

All those superintendents can do is repeatedly flush the greens as best they can.

"The heat's tough, but water management is a bigger issue on grass in the South," Moore said.

"Combine poor water with the temperatures we're having, and now you have some problems,"

he said. "Depending on green construction and the amount of play, a lot of times the greens will fade on them no matter how hard they try."

"It gets so hot in the root zone that no matter what you do, the bentgrass roots die off."

On the fairways, he said, the

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EUROPEAN BIRD WATCHING OPEN REAPS REWARDS

DORKING, Surrey, England — The public image of golf courses as environmental showcases received a boost May 17 with the European Golf Association's Birdwatching Open. The EGA's Ecology Unit staged a similar event last year, The Birdwatching Ryder Cup, with 12 courses on either side of the Atlantic making up two teams. The lighthearted competition saw European courses scoring 217 different species of birds against 238 from the United States. Because of the percentage of species on the respective continents, Europe won the competition. This year the format changed. All courses in Europe were invited to participate, with the aim of logging valuable ecological data.

North American Birdwatching Open proves point

OCEAN CITY, Md. — The Club at Seabrook Island in South Carolina, Summerlea Golf & Country Club in Quebec, Canada and Rum Pointe Seaside Golf Links won the honors at an international birding competition held during early May.

In the North American Golf Course Birdwatching Open,

sponsored by the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary System, those courses finished first through third, respectively, for most birds sighted, while Rum Pointe won the award for best birds.

Volunteers at 36 Audubon-registered courses across North America spent May 9 counting birds. The effort provided

Audubon with information on the importance of well-managed golf course habitats for wildlife.

"We hope that the true winners of the Golf Course Birdwatching Open will be all wildlife and, in particular, migratory birds," said Jean Mackay, education director for Audubon International. "The Golf Course Birdwatching Open will illustrate the potential that various types of land have as wildlife habitat in North America."

At the Club at Seabrook Island, 77 species were spotted, while at Summerlea 75 were sighted and at Rum Pointe there were 70 different species.

"We could have had a lot more species, maybe even another 20 or 25 that we normally see on the course," said David Ciekot, environmental coordinator for Rum Pointe, "but the weather was so bad. We had a Northeaster blow in that day, with heavy rain and 30-knot winds, so I'm still very pleased with the numbers."

"Certainly our site on the coastal bay near Assateague Island helped our sightings," said Ciekot. "We had a great number of gulls, waterfowl, and wading birds, like willets and several species of sandpipers. It was pleasantly surprising, though, that as a newer course still initiating habitat management plans, we sighted such a diversity of forest, upland, and meadow favoring species. Wood thrushes, towhees, and various sparrows and finches really helped our count."

Across North America the Birdwatching Open produced a wide range of results, from the top count of 77 all the way down to a low count of 14 species. Audubon International attributed the wide spread to a number of factors, including weather, diversity of habitats and the skill levels of the people conducting the counts.

"Everyone here at Rum Pointe is excited about our Best Birds award in the Birdwatching Open," said superintendent Chuck Poole. "This shows that not only can golf courses be good for a few types of birds, but that they can be quality habitat for a wide diversity of species as well."

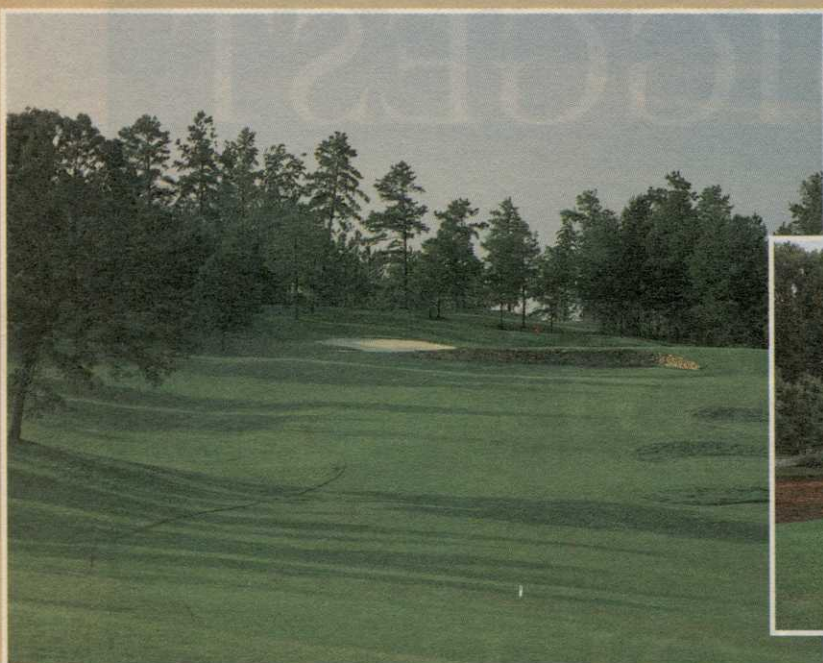
Southern drought

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damage at first is thin and dry turf. But that leads to other problems later on.

Soil as well as water quality has made a big difference from course to course, Moore said. "Some soils hold three times as much water as others. Obviously those survive a lot better."

"It promises to be a really long summer for superintendents when it comes to greens management," Moore added.

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