

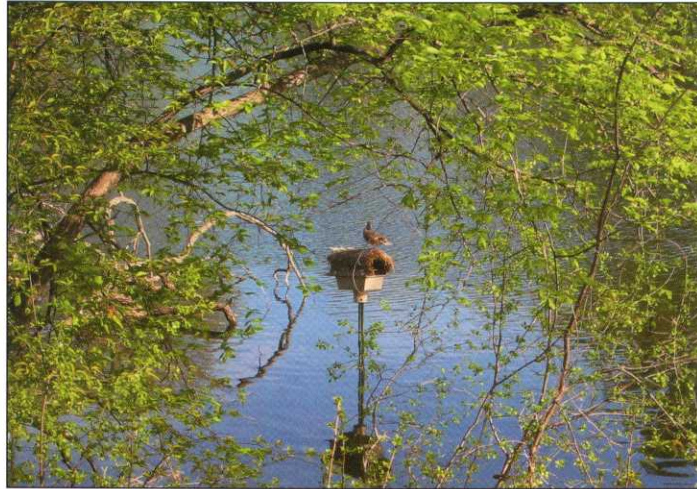
Providing Wildlife Requirements On the Golf Course

By **MIKE BROWER**
Golf Course Superintendent
Minnesota Valley Country Club



We've been busy at our club preparing for the fast approaching Minnesota golf season. One of those preparations is to provide wildlife with their basic requirements. With good planning and preparation prior to the start of the golf season, we can best provide the four basic wildlife requirements of food, water, shelter and living space. This includes planning new beneficial plantings, purchasing and preparing nesting structures, determining where diverse wildlife habitat areas can be added or improved. Getting to that work now is necessary, because most of these need to be in place or ready to go as winter leaves us and we get back on the course. And as you know, once we're able to return to the course, most of our attention is paid to getting the course open. So getting a jump on it now, will give us the best chance of providing land that supports a diverse wildlife population.

As we progress through the early stages of winter, we're looking at how successful we were in the previous year at providing food, water, shelter and living space to wildlife. As we review these issues, we're looking for ways or items that will improve our success. For instance, one issue that we've identified is that we're lacking berry producing plants in our no-mow areas. Berry producing plants provide great food for songbirds as well as excellent cover. We'll be adding winterberry and serviceberry to meet this need. Another issue is how we're going to provide a plant buffer around a new pond that was constructed on the course this past year. We're identifying plants and designs for the new pond that will benefit wildlife, yet meet the needs of our members as they play the course. We're also



"Successful in the water, mallard hen house at Minnesota Valley Country Club."

inspecting our nesting structures to see if repairs are needed, new homes are needed or locations need to be altered. Many of these structures need to be up and ready for wildlife in mid-March, so preparing them now greatly increases the use and success of them. With the increased focus on reducing inputs and costs, we're looking hard at areas of the course that are candidates for a reduced level of maintenance. Several areas have been identified as potential no-mow/naturalized areas. We are in the final stages of determining which areas to change and the expected cost savings that will result. These are just a few examples of what can be done now. The following items may also help get that started.

Bluebirds

Most golf courses offer great opportunities for successful bluebird trails. The initial cost is minimal and worth every dollar, especially when you see and hear how golfers enjoy them. A trail is a series of bluebird houses set across the golf course. They should be set in an open area free of any major underbrush, yet have a

single tree, fence line or similar perch nearby. Bluebirds love to keep an eye on their houses from a perch nearby. We frequently see them perched on the back of benches and on top of tee signs. We prefer the Peterson house to others, and bluebirds prefer an oval entrance hole to a round one. We have thirty houses in pairs of two, and they're placed on metal poles. Over 300 bluebirds have been fledged over the past four golf seasons using these techniques. More detailed information such as written guides, local contacts and products, can be gathered from the Bluebird Recovery Program. Their website is

www.bbrp.org, so check it out and get those houses up as soon as you can. You'll be happy you did!

Mallards, Mergansers, Wood Ducks

These waterfowl, and others, are great candidates for man-made nest structures. Expansion and development have reduced the population of waterfowl, and our decision to place houses on golf courses can help reverse that. To avoid the common predator raccoon, it's best to place the houses directly over water. We've also had success with wood duck houses on trees, but less so than in the water. As with most nesting programs, the cost is minimal compared to what is gained. There are many ways to get started. I recommend. Dakota Nesting Structures, in Valley City, No. Dak. Their website is www.dakotanesting.com. In there you can find some great waterfowl nesting structures. We use the hen house and the delta house and both have a proven track record.

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Pair of bluebird houses near the 15th tee at Minnesota Valley with residents perched on top.

Wildlife Requirements-

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Songbirds and Naturalized Areas

Birds are warm-blooded so they need a constant supply of energy. That's why we place nine feeders up around the property in late fall to early spring. Providing a diverse habitat and living space for songbirds means that the population will be more diverse and abundant. Identifying plant material that provides valuable habitat and food is a great way to get started with a songbird program. Creating that habitat is the next step. There are numerous publications on creating wildlife habi-

tat, but the one I recommend was written specifically for golf courses. It's *Managing Wildlife Habitat on Golf Courses*, by Ron Dodson. You can purchase it from GCSAA or Ann Arbor Press. A great source of information and products is Coveside Conservation Products, in the state of Maine, whose website is www.coveside.com. They have a wide range of houses from woodpecker houses to finch houses.

Of course, this is only part of an overall environmental plan for a golf course. More information and assistance on environmental planning for golf courses can be gained from Audubon International and the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses at www.auduboninternational.org. Check out their website and the others listed here, and get stated today on these fun projects. Your commitment to environmental stewardship will be enjoyed by staff, golfers and wildlife!

What a beautiful thing!



No. 4 at Minnesota Valley with naturalized fescue area in background; notice the nice contrast in color and texture.

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