IN TOUCH WITH NATURE

Blacklick Woods Metro Golf Course is visited regularly by wildlife from the surrounding metropark. The superintendent, however, would be a little happier without the added animal traffic.

by Jeff Sobul, assistant editor

Kerry Ortmeyer could probably use some help from the late Marlin Perkins of TV's "Wild Kingdom." His course, 36-hole Blacklick Woods Metro Golf Course near Columbus, Ohio, gets regular visits from the local wildlife. But it's no party.

"We're right next door to the park," he notes. Deer make an almost daily trek across the course. "Whatever gets in their way, they just go right across it."

By land...

A number of holes get deer tracks on the greens and in the sand traps. (Ortmeyer speculates that the deer like the way the sand feels on their hoofs.) He says that if the deer walk across the course the damage is usually minimal. But if they run, and the course

Despite an ongoing program to plant trees over the past 10 to 15 years, Blacklick Woods Golf Course remains relatively wide open, to the delight of most weekend golfers.
happens to be a bit moist, then there are problems
with tracks. The deer also ate a wildflower area he
was attempting to establish, as well as some other
flower beds.

Ortmeyer says, however, that deer problems are not
that serious, merely annoying. Besides, he adds, "we’re
not allowed to do anything because all park lands are
open to wildlife. The course is part of the park. The
deer have more right to be there than we do."

Wildlife problems don’t stop there. "We are vastly
overpopulated with racoons and skunks," Ortmeyer
says. When grubs invade the fairways, immediate
roughs and green banks in September and October,
skunks and racoons follow shortly thereafter, tearing
up the ground in search of the tasty little morsels.

"(The animals) don’t have anywhere else to go," he
says. "They’ve literally torn up whole areas looking
for grubs."

Ortmeyer estimates that he and his crew spend
three to six hours per day repairing damage done by
the little furballs. Sometimes it involves removing
and reseeding the damaged area, other times it only
involves rolling a piece of sod displaced by a racoon
back in place.

This year and last year the problems have been
mostly with masked chafer grubs. However, seven or
eight years ago, the city of Reyn-

oldsberg, the closest town to the
city, suffered a Japanese beetle
invasion. These were taken out
just in time for the masked
chafers to arrive. "If it’s not one
thing, it’s another," Ortmeyer
laments.

The grubs like to take up res-
idence on green banks shielded
from the wind. "We get mostly
west winds so grubs infest the east-facing green
banks where they have shelter from the wind," Ort-
meyer says. "When the winds are from the east,
the grubs are on the west side."

For four years he had been using Oftanol to con-
trol the grubs, with some success. Now, however, the
Oftanol seems to no longer be effective. Therefore,
Ortmeyer has switched to using Sevin and Mocap.

Part of the problem, Ortmeyer notes, is that the
park is "landlocked," surrounded on all four sides by
either interstate highways or housing developments.

Because of the traffic, Ortmeyer notes, "we can’t do
everything we want. We have to get in and get out fast." To con-
serve time and keep disruption of play to a minimum, the staff
works on only one nine-hole section at a time. Aerifying and
top-dressing are done on a lim-
ited basis at best, but he says they
have "plenty of chemicals
doing a good job."

His biggest cultural problem has been anthrac-

nose on Poa annua in poa/bluegrass fairways. A fungicide program has kept that in control. The
greens are bentgrass. "We don’t have the irrigation or
budget to maintain bent fairways," he notes. "but
our budget is enough so that we don’t have to cut
corners either."

The course is funded by Franklin County though it
is actually a sub-division of the state. A board of
directors is appointed by a state probate judge to run
the course. The course submits its own budget to the
county and, according to Ortmeyer, has had suffi-
cient funding in each of the 19 years he has been
superintendent.

The grubs like to take up residence on green
banks shielded from the wind.

...and by air

Geese also cause problems at Blacklick Woods, as
they seem to do at many courses. Ortmeyer says they
overwinter near the course and in spring they con-
gregate on course ponds.

They eat turf on greens and fairways and then
leave their deposits on the same. Luckily (for the
golfers), there are only a few ponds on the course so
the problem is not a major one. It did become enough
of an inconvenience to get the Ohio Department of
Natural Resources out to trap and transplant a num-
ber of the foul fowl. "We’ve had a few others come in," notes Ortmeyer, "but they don’t seem to be
hanging around."

The geese are probably fortunate they aren’t
hanging around. The two courses, one championship
length and one executive length, handle about
75,000 rounds each year, about 60 percent on the
championship course. That’s a lot of errant golf balls
for the geese to dodge.

Year-round job

The course is open year-round so those rounds are
spaced out somewhat over the course of an entire
year. Ortmeyer stresses that being open year-round
does not put any added pressure on him or the
course. "The weather is what puts pressure on me.
"If we’re going to have problems, we don’t let it
go out of hand," he says. "If our tees and greens
aren’t playable, we won’t open."

Ortmeyer terms this past winter as extraordinary.
"There was much play during the winter," but, he
adds, "we weren’t open more than 45 days over a
three-month period (December-February)."

"We open when conditions are suitable," adds
course general manager Joe Hoover. "We’ll close the
course even in the summer. It’s a day-to-day
decision."

Working in traffic

Maintaining a high level of playability around all	hose golfers is a difficult task for Ortmeyer’s six full-
time staffers and six or seven additional summer
help.