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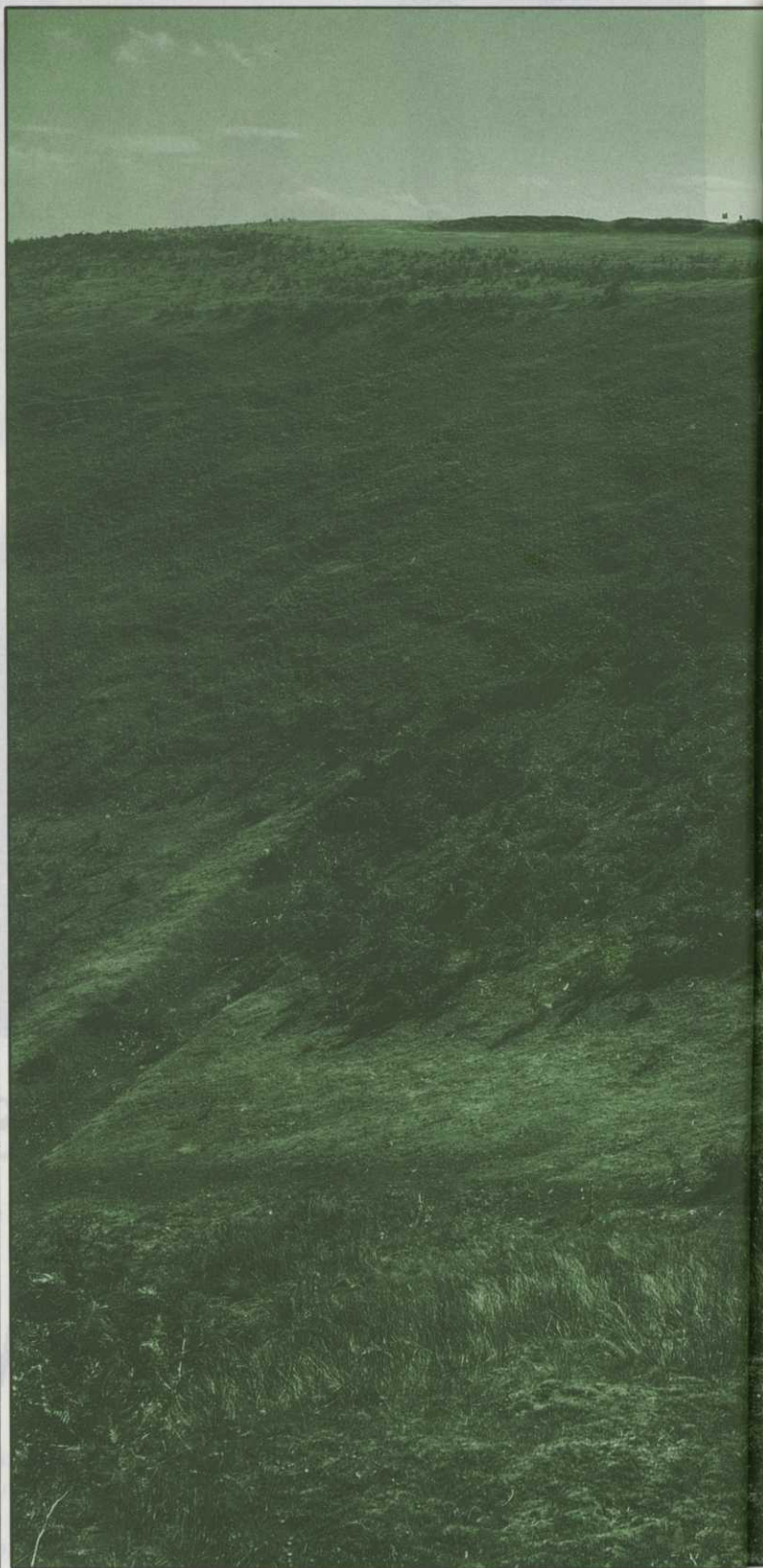
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IAN DAIR, Assistant Director with the Nature Conservancy Council, writes of the Council's aims for golf course ecological preservation, essentially as a primer to the introduction of their new Greenkeepers Conservation Management Plan...

Golf is booming. It used to be something for the privileged few (Scotland excepted). Now, millions take part in the sport and many millions more wish they could. Golf is big business and is already a major land user with the 1,800 or so courses in Great Britain covering around 100,000 hectares. If the R & A's predictions on the need for more courses are fulfilled there could be another 700 courses in England and Wales alone covering another 40,000 hectares.

If it hasn't done so already, golf has to grow up very quickly to meet this new status. It must be aware of its position in the world at large. That it is doing so, and very well, is expressed in the initiatives which the Royal and Ancient's Greenkeeping Panel have taken in issuing their two discussion documents 'The Way Forward' and 'The Demand for Golf'. 'The Way Forward' recognises in particular that 'when managing the land on which golf is played we must ensure that greenkeeping practices are beyond reproach from the rest of the community. The



Above - Sundridge Park Golf Course, Kent.
On Pages 14, 15 - Church Stretton Golf Course, Shropshire

conservation lobby grows annually in strength and a little planning now may save a lot of trouble in 10/15 years time'. My organisation, the Nature Conservancy Council, is part of the conservation lobby - the reasoned and responsible part, given that any lobby will have this part and the other (no less useful in its way) with a more than single-minded devotion to the cause. To quote again from 'The Way Forward' - 'it must therefore be in the interest of course management - and the game - to form a proper working relationship with the NCC, in order that future plans work to the benefit of both parties. And, again, to publicise the part that Golf Clubs

● Continued on Page 19

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● From Page 17

play in responsibly conserving wildlife for the benefit of the whole community'. A nature conservationist, whether reasoned or rabid, couldn't put it better.

So, what has the Nature Conservancy Council done to respond to this overture from the R & A? A lot, is the answer – but hand in glove with the R & A, the National Golf Unions and your own association, BIGGA. Our aim in so doing has been to encourage the golf world to manage its land and its activities with nature conservation, or its recreation, in mind: to assist the golf world to do this: and to achieve both these aims with a minimum call on the NCC itself since, as a Government agency, we are kept on a very tight rein by the Treasury.

How could we help the golf world to keep golf green? I happen to be the chairman of my Golf Club and Mike Schofield, the colleague who worked with me on our nature conservation and golf course project, is a keen golfer himself. So we knew that whatever we did had to

be acceptable to the golf world and to the people who control what happens on golf courses is the captain, the chairman of green and, most importantly, the greenkeepers. So we asked them what they wanted, consulted them over what we were producing and gained their support and commitment throughout. The result has been a book 'On Course Conservation – Managing Golf's Natural Heritage'. This was sponsored and fully endorsed by the R & A and launched by Michael Bonalack at the ETME Conference in Harrogate in January 1990. It was distributed free to every club in Great Britain. We are following this up with an example of a conservation management plan for your course which the greenkeeper can complete.

This is what the NCC and the golf authorities are doing. But what can you as a greenkeeper do to manage your course for conservation? Well, first of all get hold of the book from the captain or secretary. Look out for the training courses on conservation management which BIGGA conduct regularly. But, most of all, think of yourself not just as a golf greenkeeper but as a conservation manager for your course. I never cease to be impressed by the general conservation knowledge, and the specific knowledge of their own course, which comes across whenever I talk to greenkeepers. I feel confident that in looking after wildlife you are looking after the interest of the golfers who use your course, that course itself and golf in general. Michael Bonalack put this eloquently, 'In these times when so many species of plants and animals are endangered by so called progress it is good to think that golf has a tremendous opportunity to reverse this trend'.

General points for turf on the golf course

1 Management: To get greens into play in the shortest time choose turf which has been intensively maintained at a relatively low cutting height in the turf grower's nursery.

2 Disease: Should disease affect a turf containing a mixture of grasses it is likely that one of the grasses will be less susceptible and will fill in gaps created by the death of its companion grass. A single species turf (pure bent or pure fescue) cannot do this.

3 Weeds: All cultivated turf should be free of both broad-leaved weeds and weed grasses, particularly annual meadow grass.

4 Soil Type: Most new golf greens are constructed with a sand/soil rootzone mix. In terms of natural soil this most closely approximates to "loamy sand" or "sandy loam". A turf supplier should be able to provide information.

5 Samples: The best way to choose turf if you are at all unsure is to inspect the field from which your order is to come, or to obtain a representative sample as close as possible to harvest date. Any reputable turf grower will welcome the opportunity to show you his fields.

6 Price: It is expensive to produce a good quality turf. If you are offered turf at a cheap price be very wary and find out what has reduced the price. As with many products, you get what you pay for.

7 Independent Advice: There are many so-called advisers jumping on the golf course bandwagon. Use only qualified agronomists for advice.

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