

The art of greenkeeping, according to ROBERT TAYLOR, relies on a dedicated approach to work – and with green issues a top priority, now much more than ever before

It is estimated there are in the region of 2,100 golf courses established or being established throughout Great Britain, amounting to over 120,000 hectares of land. The terrain and vegetation classifications on which such golf courses are situated varies from heathland/moorland, parkland (predominantly broad-leaved or coniferous woodland and grasslands) through to the sand dunes and slacks of maritime or links courses.

It is also estimated that only two to three hectares of the course – ie. the putting and teeing areas – are or should be intensively managed. The fairways, excluding carry but including the greens collars, surrounds and bunkers etc., may total up to 17 hectares leaving up to 40 hectares (on an average course) which can be divided between deep rough, semi rough and the fairway carries. Indeed, the deep rough alone may occupy up to 40% of the total land, depending upon the course standard. Thus, working on the lowest figures, up to 42,000 hectares of rough is represented within the nation's golf resource.

Small wonder, therefore, that where very little time and resource is given to this land criticisms highlighting the 'selfish use' are resulting in harm to the sport, especially where planning applications for further development are submitted.

Definitions

The concept of rough and the need for its management are not always immediately understood. In the rules of golf the term 'rough' is not specifically defined but is included in 'through the green'. The latter is taken to include fairways.

Ideally the rough and the management thereof should include all the areas of the course surrounding the green, tee and fairway of each hole. Any rough management programme should consider the range of vegetation associations such as the various forms of grassland, the woodlands, copses and shelter screens, the heath (or heather dominated communities) and the water features including ponds, lakes, dykes and drainage ditches.

Ecological management of the golf course should not be thought of strictly as 'rough management'. The fairways, bunker moundings and surrounds situated on suitable nutrient poor soil types may often be included. Indeed several have been designated with the status of Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), and may be severely damaged by insensitive management operations. Incorrect management can lead to a fairly rapid change in the species composition and the loss of desirable herb and grass species from the sward. Such areas would form part of the overall ecological management programme.

Management objectives

Ideally an initial survey of the course should be undertaken to determine both the present vegetation associations and the type of management necessary to enhance or retain



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the existing character. Within the survey it may be useful to assess the history of the site with respect to possible successions or the change in vegetation and species abundance. This is often helpful in highlighting particular problems which can then be addressed.

A certain amount of expertise is required when evaluating a particular golf course site. On a heathland course, for example, it would be wrong to encourage management toward great species diversity. The development for diversity for its own sake is rarely a wise conservation goal and is certainly inappropriate on heathland. Diversity here would invariably result in the reduction of those characteristics and species of greatest importance. It is important that the appraisal be carried out by a competent ecologist experienced in the game of golf, one sympathetic to the needs and priorities of the sport.

The data and results obtained from such a site inspection should be drawn together and encompassed in a 'Plan of Action' for the course. Such a document should outline an appropriate management strategy taking into account all areas of the course and the varying habitat types present. The plan must consider the requirements of golf (the strategy and character of each hole) and the ecological needs in

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