

LINLITHGOW GC

David Roy, course manager at Linlithgow Golf Club, West Lothian, explains how and why he got involved in golf course conservation, and how you can allay your club's fear of environmentalists.

My involvement with golf course conservation started in June 1992 when I responded on behalf of the club to an offer of a free species study to be carried out on the course. This study was part of a local initiative and the work was duly carried out by the Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT) and paid for jointly by UK2000 and Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH).

It was during the species study that I found out that my knowledge of what was growing on the golf course was virtually non-existent. Merely walking round the course with the surveyors from the SWT I learned a great deal and I quickly became far more interested in finding out more about the local flora and fauna.

It was suggested at this point that this local initiative could be expanded into a national scheme promoting golf course conservation. This would take the form of each club in Scotland appointing a conservation officer to help the course manager draw up a wildlife management plan. The technical data necessary to produce a plan like this would come from the local Wildlife Trust or similar such body and once the plan was written it would be kept up-to-date and possibly modified by both the conservation officer and the course manager.

The honorary conservation officer at Linlithgow Golf Club at that time was George Anderson who I approached because he was already a member of the SWT. George worked very hard and collected a good proportion of the information required to draw up our management plan.

Unfortunately George retired to Southport but we were again fortunate in finding Crawford Smith who, like George, is a SWT member as well as being a member of the golf club. So with the combined efforts of Gill Smart from the SWT, George Anderson and Karen Morrison of SNH, we have created a conservation management policy for Linlithgow Golf Club which, if carried out correctly, will serve the club for many years to come.

It is interesting to note that the SWT have gained from the experience of working closely with a golf club and some long-held preconceptions have been broken down. It was common, for example, for environmentalists to suppose that golf courses used fertilisers and chemicals in the same manner and quantity as intensive agriculture.

I have now been involved with conservation for a little over a year and this time has just been enough for me to become acquainted with the necessary expressions that are commonly used by environmental bodies. For example, a species has various forms of rarity, and although northern marsh orchids may flower in profusion in many parts of the country, this plant may be classed as locally rare if found on your golf course. If it turns out to be the case



Linlithgow Golf Club

Photograph: Lorne Gill

that these orchids on your golf course are the only ones in a radius of 50 miles then this can count as a source of pride for the club as a whole.

There are many other apparently simple aspects to caring for the environment that will be learned from becoming involved in conservation, but most importantly it is the fact that wildlife habitats are disappearing all over the country and golf courses are a potential haven for many apparently 'common' forms of wildlife.

It is my opinion that Linlithgow Golf Club is representative of many clubs in Britain and the attitude of our committee to my involvement in conservation may well be similarly representative. Initially the committee only had to grant permission for the survey to take place, but when it became apparent that the club was a potentially important wildlife site the message to George and me was one of fear of the power of environmental legislation being used against any future expansion of the club. This initially implied to me that regardless of the rarity of the flora found on the course, this would willingly be sacrificed for the sake of some architectural tinkering with the design of the course.

It was at this point that I feel that we failed in bringing across the true meaning of what conservation means to Linlithgow.

Firstly, the legal power of environmental legislation is in reality minimal. Even the governmental quango, Scottish Natural Heritage, has to go through a complicated process of designation before there is any form of protec-

tion at all for endangered habitats and even then this is scanty to say the least.

Secondly, the very essence of this wildlife initiative is that by enhancing the wildlife of the course this will in turn increase the aesthetic value or "feel good" factor so often found on many of the great courses in Britain.

Thirdly, the cautious manner in which our committee approached the wildlife initiative simply highlights how important it is that the ideals of conservation are presented properly. It should be stressed that at all times the club has total and absolute control over the development of a conservation management plan. It is the club who will use the expertise of environmental bodies to improve the golf course. If there are areas of conflict between conservation and golf, the club will always have the last say in what happens in these locations.

At Linlithgow we have had to break down preconceptions on both sides of the fence, but the hard work put in by all involved will hopefully benefit not only future generations of golfers at our club but those wishing to follow our example.

I may add that my involvement with the Scottish Wildlife Trust has added a whole new dimension to my job which I enjoy immensely and I feel that many other greenkeepers would feel likewise.

TEMPLE GC

Here is an edited version of the 45-page environmental report prepared by local conservationists for Temple Golf Club, Maidenhead, and its course manager, Martin Gunn.

Following an ecological report on Temple Golf Club by the Sports Turf Research Institute, volunteers from local conservation