

The chase after colour must cease

I have no wish to compound Alistair Connall's problems and indeed I make it a rule not to criticise unless I have seen matters for myself and although I am fully conversant with both background and events my intervention is on the basis that there is so much to learn from his comments, in general rather than particular terms, that my observations may draw attention to the revealed causes of the crisis.

Collingtree, established 1987, is hardly a new course. The long line of problems it has experienced follow, as night follows day, the decision of an inexperienced US "designer" to use "pure sand greens and Penncross". Both have been comprehensively condemned, often and specifically, by most of not all advisers – certainly by STRI and myself for years. "Unfortunately the predominant grass species is now annual meadow grass which seeds almost continually". Precisely! Any plant seeding "almost continually" is clearly under stress – nature's reaction to the threat of imminent death is to reproduce.

Sand only greens demand constant feeding with NPK and lime. This ensures total dominance of *Poa annua* in temperate climes. Failure to do so results in massive attacks of Take All Patch disease. This grass is the source of 90% of the problems in greenkeeping. Slow (seeding) putting surfaces follow – and encourage close mowing to try to collect the seed and speed up putting surfaces. Stressed grass responds for a limited period to this feeding but constant close mowing pushes even *Poa* beyond its limits of endurance.

"Symptoms seemed to indicate leaf spot"! This is never a significant disease – but the symptoms did indicate severe stress not disease. Fungicides would be counter-productive and ineffective. Allowing the cuttings to fly would ensure *Poa* dominance but it died instead – end of story. The stressful regime "caused *Poa* to complete its life cycle". Precisely! I am reminded of one club who told me they were concerned that their greens (*Poa*) were dying. "No, Sir you are killing them" was my reply – but gave them hope and they now have 50/50 *Poa/Agrostis* greens.

Finally we are told the grass is recovering (or regenerated) "proving that A.M.G can survive". It most certainly *can* recover – that is why it is so prevalent and such a persistent problem, especially in that it is

such a very poor winter grass.

What is the moral of this sorry tale? Where does the blame lie? Not with the greenkeeper dealing with a difficult situation of which he has no previous experience. There are virtually no good sand-only greens – and the one or two that are, are a tribute to the skill exercised in management.

Does it lie with advisers? Yes, but not in relation to the course, but to the principle. The expression "we gave them (in this case the European Tour) what they want", says it all.

The blame lies fairly and squarely on the shoulders of the professional Tour touting for "customers through turnstiles" and prostituting sound greenkeeping principles (of both construction and maintenance) to appeal alike to the great God television and ill-educated entry golfers.

All those spectator golfers who enthuse about "beautifully green" courses for summer tournaments will be the first to moan if as a result they are on temporaries for most of

the winter – when the Tour will be enjoying golf in warmer climes. If our traditional game is to survive and all year round golf remain feasible then this chase after colour – the "Augusta syndrome" – must stop.

Before dismissing me as some crotchety old Victor Meldrew of golf, think on! We have seen it all before (well, I have) in the '60s and '70s, when the feed and water brigade destroyed so many of our courses – and here we go again. If basic principles are ignored and sound management stopped eg by hotel managers, "because it might upset the guests" then nemesis will assuredly strike and strike again. Too many venues for televised golf fall far short of expectation for this to be mere coincidence. Failures are not acts of God, unfortunate accidents or due to previously unheard of diseases. They are the direct result of bad construction methods and bad subsequent management.

Jim Arthur

Taking an ecological view

I found the article entitled "The Buzz Never Stops at Wentworth" about Chris Kennedy – October *Greenkeeper International* – very interesting but felt that relating to heathland management the comment "some people say there shouldn't be any trees on a heathland golf course but I disagree" if taken literally could lead to the loss of heathland courses and their reversion to woodland.

Heathlands by definition are "open landscapes largely devoid of tree species, characterised by nutrient, poor acid soils and a domination of low growing shrubs, principally of the heath (*Ericaceae*) family, (*Culluna vulgaris*) being the most prominent species".

Management is the key to maintaining the heathlands, either naturally through grazing or via physical methods employed by man. These processes have continued over 4,000 years since the first forest clearances by our early farming ancestors depleted the nutrient status of these predominantly sand areas. Many species of wildlife have, over this period, become totally dependent upon the heathland conditions, several are of international importance ie

Red data species on the brink of extinction. Golf is contributing to the conservation of heathlands, helping to extend what is now a very fragmented resource.

The final straw leading to a further loss of our heathlands would be to stop management and let succession take its course. From an ecological viewpoint loss of heathland through tree regeneration and the reinstatement of woodland would not be the most appropriate conservation strategy. From a golf point of view, tree invasion will reduce the prestige and status of the heathland course, its strategic/playing quality whilst at the same time reducing the overall aesthetic contribution that the open heathland condition can offer.

Indeed, on so many courses where heather was once a dominant feature large areas of this attractive and penalising hazard have now already been lost.

Thus, whilst some trees are tolerable, and indeed necessary, on our heathland courses their potential for natural spread must be recognised and rigorously controlled.

R.S Taylor
STRI Ecologist

Value for money

I write to you to convey my thanks through your magazine firstly to Rod Clark of Vector Training and Ken Richardson BIGGA for running an excellent two day course in Computer Skills at Falkirk recently.

The training was first class and I and other members of the class gained excellent practical use of computers which I hope will become of great use in the future.

Secondly I would like to thank all contributors to the BIGGA Education and Development Fund for making these courses possible.

I would recommend any of these courses to anyone. Great value for money!

Thanks again.

Gordon I. McKie
St. Andrews

Times change

How times have changed. I was a Head Greenkeeper at two golf clubs for a number of years in the '70s. The frustration of lack of investment in machinery and the fact that the job was not being done to my satisfaction finally drove me out of the job, which I still think is the best job for any outdoor worker.

Recently, I started back at my local golf club as an assistant and was amazed and envious of the amount of equipment now available to the Greens Staff. With so much equipment on hand and double the staff when I was Head, the opportunity is there to do the job quicker and to do it better.

Unfortunately I was also amazed and dismayed at the frenetic and often obscure efforts to get certain jobs down in record times.

Golf courses are becoming very busy places, more and more people want to play this great game and any ideas of how to get the job done quicker is obviously very welcome. What I can't accept is the surrender of quality to quantity. There should be no compromise on presentation.

Name Supplied

Footnote

Re: Mr Jeffrey's problem "How do I tackle pearlwort?" in August's magazine. I have found on my lawn that by applying "Verdone" in dry conditions, then twisting your foot on the Pearlwort gets results.

C.C Moore
Budleigh Salterton, Devon