



Education Update

BY KEN RICHARDSON

Ecology on the course: always a lot to learn

Following on from the very successful, but tiring, regional finals of the TORO/Lely/PGA European Tour Student of the Year Competition and prior to the start of this year's Regional Supervisory Management Courses, in Scotland, I attended an interesting and informative seminar on golf course ecology, at the Royal Holloway College, University of London.

Audubon International Golf Ecology Seminar 26 September 1996

Audubon International is the major ecological organisation in the USA.

Together with the United States Golf Association, they have initiated a Cooperative Sanctuary System which aims to encourage golf courses, in the USA, to operate to an ecologically responsible management plan.

The aims are to preserve biological diversity, reduce dependence on non-renewable resources, increase natural habitat and protect water quality and quantity.

The European Golf Association Ecology Unit, which was established in January 1994, was developed in recognition of the need for a coordinated European approach to environmental issues in golf. The EGA Ecology unit aims to establish a solid factual understanding of the environmental attributes of golf courses, to develop the environmental aspects of golf courses, to encourage a higher standard of environmental performance and to provide a contribution to environmental debate in Europe. The EGA Ecology Unit hopes to realise some of these aims by initiating its Pan European Environmental Management Programme for golf courses. There will be two key components to this programme:

a. *A Green Flag Campaign for European Golf Courses.* This will be in the form of a voluntary Environmental Management Programme based on the principles of the Eco Management and Audit Scheme and the highly successful Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Programme. Golf Clubs which engage to improve their environmental performance

and implement Best Management Practice guidelines will be eligible for recognition in the form of a green flag award.

b. *An environmental dimension to the Ryder Cup.* The focal point for the launch of the Scheme will be a major public awareness initiative in association with the Ryder Cup at Valderrama, Spain, in September 1997. The aim of the campaign will be to raise the awareness of not only golfers and all those involved in the golf industry but also to show the general public that golf courses do have a major part to play in preserving the ecological balance by using best management practices on the golf course.

Best Management Practice for the Protection of Natural Resources on Golf Courses

Because of continuing public concerns, general awareness and media pressure, golf course management decisions of the future will have to be based on sound ecological practices. In many people's eyes, golf courses are gross polluters and energy wasters but those with a knowledge of turfgrasses can offer many positive aspects of golf courses and golf. Dr Charles Peacock, from North Carolina State University gave an example of how public perception can be influenced by the popular press printing ill informed and, sometimes, completely untrue information. The following information was printed in a newspaper in North Carolina:

"City sewage, industrial wastewater, farm fertilisers, livestock manure and lawn and golf course chemicals are changing the Neuse River, choking it with Nitrogen and Phosphorus".

When the reporter was questioned about research which showed that any of the river's pollution problems were associated with turfgrass or golf courses she admitted that she had made generalisations. However, the damage was done and the public linked pollution of a river to golf courses. To prevent this type of misinformation being published, golf course managers will need to be proactive and develop sound ecological management plans to ensure that the media and the general public do

not have any material to support the anti golf lobby.

How does all of this affect BIGGA, its members and all golf greenkeepers? Pressure from governments, the general public and pressure groups will not go away. The EGA Golf Ecology Unit initiative will make European Golf Courses think about and perhaps change the way that golf courses are managed. Golfers will expect to see courses managed in ecologically sound ways and golf greenkeepers will have to adapt their skills to meet these demands. BIGGA recognised the need to make greenkeepers more aware of the need for ecological management by the launch of its book *A Practical Guide to the Ecological Management of Golf Courses*, in cooperation with the Sports Turf Research Institute, inclusion of speakers at the National Education Conference and Seminar Programme giving

talks on ecological management and by commissioning a training video which will complement the aforementioned book. These initiatives should give greenkeepers the knowledge and skills needed to conduct an ecological survey, produce an ecological management plan and follow the greenkeeping practices needed to ensure that golf courses continue to be assets to the environment.

Many of the delegates at this seminar were from non-golf, environmental backgrounds and it was obvious that the message that golf courses could be great assets to the environment was not getting across. It can only be hoped that the efforts of the EGA, the Home Golf Unions, the R&A and BIGGA in educating golfers, greenkeepers and the general public make sure that the positive contribution that golf courses make to the environment is recognised.

**IF I WERE
A WEED
I'D BE
TREMBLING
IN MY
ROOTS**



**JANUARY
LAUNCH**