



# At One with nature

Canada geese on the green at Rudding Park. Picture by Scott MacCallum

**Rudding Park in Harrogate is the most environmentally aware golf course in the country. Scott MacCallum discovered why.**

It's not too many people who can claim they are the best in the country. Anyone who rises to the top, in whatever field, has shown talent, determination and operates to a set of personal standards which marks he, she or it apart from the majority.

Rudding Park, in Harrogate, is one golf course which can claim to be the best. In this case the best for its environmental practices, as the current holder of the Amazone Golf Environment

Award – which this year becomes the BIGGA Environmental Award in association with Amazone and Rhône Poulenc – having been judged to be the golf course which does most to encourage a harmonious relationship between golf and the ecology of the course and the surrounding area. It also features strongly in BIGGA's new Golf Course Ecology video launched at BTME.

Not bad considering the course is still under two years old and that it had already won the regional award for the North of England in '95. So what is it that sets Rudding Park apart from the rest and what is it that is done there which makes it so special?

Well, for a start the setting is second to none. Martin Hawtree designed the course with the remit that nothing should be allowed to damage the look of the park. This has been achieved successfully with the major, and perhaps unique, element of the design that there are only six bunkers on the entire course all surrounded by trees and so virtually invisible.

"Part of the planning approval was that there should be minimal visual disturbance and it would have spoiled the look of the park if there had been a conventional number of bunkers," explained Head Greenkeeper Richard Hollingworth.

"If we didn't maintain the golf course it would only be a year until it reverted to parkland and you wouldn't know a golf course has been here other than the contouring and mounding around the greens," explained Richard.

The course opened on May 25, 1995 but Richard arrived at the course, having previously been an assistant at Moortown in Leeds, just after the contractors had finished seeding.

"Even before there was any grass it looked like an established golf course with avenues of oak trees radiating out from the house. The setting almost sold itself and the Hawtree design complements the surroundings."



## Great Hadham's Green Recovery

When David Dollimore took over at Great Hadham GC on the Herts/Essex border, greens were worn and weeds were starting to get a foothold.

His problems increased when a late April herbicide was followed by unusually severe frosts. Attempts to re-turf and then re-seed were also thwarted, this time by drought.

It was then that he spotted a Fortiva advert and, after consulting Kings Horticulture, decided to give it a go.

"We added the Fortiva treated pure bent mixture to a top dressing, chitting the seed over a weekend. Just 12 days later, it was up and running," he recalls.

"Normally I'd expect grass to take 21 days to establish, but within a fortnight it had bedded in. This was an incredible recovery, the best I've seen in 15 years.

"Fortiva treated seed is certainly worth it," he says. "Now I'll rarely consider anything else on the greens."

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"Before we opened we had a hard core of five working here together with three students who worked extremely hard picking stones in the summer months. The standard of conversation stepped up a notch when they were here," joked Richard.

The course opening coincided with the '95 drought and Richard was faced with a battle to keep greens which were facing up to their first summer, alive.

"We had two people hand watering throughout the '95 summer. It was a big shock to the greens which had come from nothing to regular mowing and golfing traffic."

Richard also maintains the irrigation system himself.

"It was a bit daunting, particularly when I fitted £3000 worth of additions to it, not having done anything like it before. But it saved quite a bit of money and now I can tackle most things," he explained.

Richard works extremely closely with Mark Mackaness, the



Bat boxes

owner of the course and the man who has masterminded many of the ecological initiatives.

These include areas of meadowland which are sensitively managed and have become a haven for wild flowers.

"To obtain the best results we leave the grasses and flowers to set their seeds before mowing and

we turn the hay several times (more than absolutely necessary) to ensure the seeds are thrashed out before baling the hay," explained Mr Mackaness.

"Conservation does not need to cost a lot – indeed the sale of hay from the meadowland areas pays for the cost of the cutting," he added.

Golfers are not excluded from the meadowland areas but venturing into them doesn't help their score.

"Golfers can play their ball from the areas of rough if they can find it – it's pretty thick. We mow the areas once a year using an agricultural mower and the seed goes everywhere," said Richard.

They are also extremely frugal when it comes to the application of chemicals.

"Many people see one weed on a fairway and spray the whole lot just in case and it is probably easier that way but we always use a knapsack and spot spray. It saves us a great deal on chemicals."



Richard Hollingworth: Head Greenkeeper at the award-winning Rudding Park



The course is a haven for rabbits, hares, wild fowl, Canada geese, bats, foxes and badgers. "We create corridors of woodland so that there is room for the mammals to move around."

Rudding Park has its very own ecologist, Chris Firth, who sees the park as his own personal nature reserve.

"He has his own hide where he watches the wildlife and monitors the badger set," and a visit to the hide enabled us to see some pheasants wandering happily about. Unfortunately they disappeared before I could get the lens cap off the camera but I was a little luckier when it came to snapping some Canada geese strolling

over a green oblivious to the golf going on around them.

The golf course should be a Mecca for any homeless bird or bat with countless trees being used a staging posts for bird or bat boxes all made out of recycled wood and all of which are numbered or lettered to allow records to be kept.

To keep golfers informed of what is around them there are nature boards scattered throughout the course which give illustrated information of the flora and the fauna.

The bat boxes have the entry hole underneath and ridges to allow them to climb in. There is also a box on three sides of a tree so the bat can decide upon the most comfortable for each time of the year – winter facing the morning sun, shaded in the summer etc.

"Occasionally Chris and I have disagreements when best golf course management practices don't coincide with the best ecological practices – whether we should clear 10 metres into the woodland or leave it naturally etc – but generally we are fairly compatible."

That compatibility is obviously the key to ensuring that the golf course does what it does best while at the same time the flora and the fauna are allowed to flourish.



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