

An environment for golf

by Bob Winfield,
Environment Consultant

Take a large number of golfers from a selection of clubs and ask, "What do you value most in your golf course environment?" There would be a high level of agreement on the preferred features of a course and the atmosphere of the surroundings. Most golfers would vote for genuine attractive countryside in keeping with the history and natural heritage of the local landscapes. What can a club do to provide such an environment? How should a club decide what is genuine, natural, local and authentic?

The interesting and challenging answer to that question is that the landscape of every golf course has its own history, and can be managed to conserve, restore or re-create features of the man-made and natural heritage of the site. A difficult decision is how far back to go in the history of a course to decide what is the local natural environment? A new

course created on farmland may look back 50 years to traditional farm management with the flora and fauna which existed before modern intensive agriculture. A course created on downland or heathland at the turn of the century will have its heritage in the man-made landscapes of earlier centuries.

A 'new order' of environmental management has developed in recent years, which recognises the priority of conserving whole natural habitats and wildlife communities in order to make any significant contribution to conservation. Adjust the management of the course to include conservation objectives, which are kept in balance with the sporting and visual objectives, in order to achieve a win/win result for both golf and the natural habitats. The golf course environment is greatly enriched by this approach, and can be used as a positive and unique benefit to enhance the golfers' enjoyment of the game.

Fine words! But what does this

mean on the ground? We are not of course talking about the main playing surfaces which are managed as sports turf. The natural course environment lies between the fairways, and around or beyond the tees and greens. In these areas there are opportunities to provide and manage a much more natural countryside at little or no cost. The opportunities were overlooked too often in the past, but happily there is now more concern for the course environment.

'We make special efforts to be as sensitive as possible to the needs of wildlife'

This is well demonstrated by the success of the BIGGA Golf Course Environment Competition, in association with Rhône Poulenc and Amazone Ground Care. Ken Richardson, Education Officer at BIGGA said "Our hope is being fulfilled that the Competition is increasing awareness of

the positive benefits that golf courses give to the environment."

Let us take one aspect of the management of non-play areas. Probably the greatest loss to the golf course environment over recent decades has occurred in the diversity of ground flora, probably the most vital element in the whole wildlife food chain. Indigenous grasses, wild flowers and wetland plants provide food for invertebrates, insects and small birds which are then available for predators higher in the food chain. Whereas an attempt to re-create the original flora of a landscape could take decades, progressive restoration work can be relatively easy and can go most of the way to an 'original' natural environment in a few years.

The course at Sandford Springs Golf Club, near Kingsclere in Hampshire, was created in the last 10 to 12 years on land previously used for mixed farming with several wooded areas. Design and construction were sensitive to the existing land-

PRESENTING THE POWERFUL NEW REELMASTER SERIES.





Ponds created at Sandford Springs are home to a thriving population of water voles – an increasingly threatened animal

scape, and subsequent management of the course has created many natural features which are both attractive and genuine local wildlife habitats. Some 20,000 trees were planted (all native species), and six ponds created in an area of three acres of marsh. This wetland is protected from the effects of intensive sports turf management, and is especially rich in wildlife. The Course Man-

ager, Norman Fenwick, who is committed to a high quality course environment said, "We make special efforts to be as sensitive as possible to the needs of wildlife, and have developed important habitat areas throughout the course."

Temple Golf Club in Berkshire was created in 1910 on chalk downland, but there was very little of the original characteristic

down grassland left by 1990. Martin Gunn, the Course Manager, amended the cutting regimes of grassland rough and semi-rough, and changed the woodland management to re-create the conditions for an exceptionally rich and attractive ground flora. Large numbers of nectar-feeding butterflies can be seen having a 'birthday' on the roughs during the summer

months. Martin said, "Only a third of the course is under sports turf and it is important to take a holistic approach to course management so that we can restore and retain important natural features." The course now makes a very important contribution to the local wildlife environment without suffering any additional problems from pests.

At Hankley Common Golf Club in Surrey, the natural heritage is lowland heath; a habitat which is now rare and threatened along with the many plants and animals which are found only in lowland heath. Until ten years ago the large areas of heath, maintained for centuries by grazing animals and rotational burning, were reverting to low quality woodland by the invasion of birch and pine seedlings. Ian McMillan, the Course Manager, has removed 40 hectares of trees and scrub to open up heathland habitats for a wide range of plants, insects and birds. Ian commented recently, "We have worked hard over the

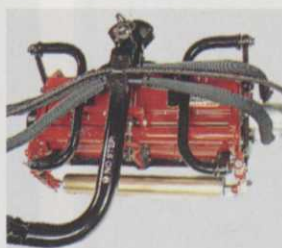
SO DEDICATED, THEY EARN THEIR STRIPES EVERYTIME.



Whatever the season, whatever the weather, this greenkeeper cuts a fine swathe through thick, uneven turf to produce the perfect fairway.

For the new Reelmaster fairway mowers boast many new, innovative features resulting in a cut like never before.

Rugged, powerful and durable, they have the lightest of touches. Their new L-I-N-K-S™ system of floating linkage and individual lift arm dampers hug the turf to get into dips and hollows for a close, all-over cut with no "bobbing", even at speeds in excess of 7mph.



The new L-I-N-K-S™ system

Quiet in operation thanks to Toro's advanced noise reduction, the powerful 38hp and 42hp diesel engines will help these machines reach inclines other mowers can't.

To win your stripes, give us a call and we'll walk your course with you and recommend the best machine for your needs.

You too can trust Toro expertise and quality. Simply telephone 01480 476971 and we'll arrange for a local dealer to contact you.



The Reelmaster 6500D, with its 5-gang mower, and the 6700D, a 7-gang mower, both offer impressive cutting technology with all-interchangeable variable speed, automatically controlled reels to handle fast-growing, tough seasonal grasses.

TORO.

Bringing perfection to play.

Roll up Roll up...



Rolawn® have
taken a big bite out
of greens turf prices

Our new promise for '97 – high quality – low prices – we won't be beaten on either.

You can buy as little or as much as you need – there's no minimum order.

As Europe's largest turf grower – we have huge stocks which means continuity of supply.

Choose from two grades of greens turf and two roll sizes.

FREE fork lift offloading, a nationwide depot network, a turf testing programme conducted by the STRI, add up to peace of mind – you just can't put a price on that, can you?

Call NOW on 01904 608661, ask for customer services and find out what's on offer.



AD
REF
34

An environment for golf

last decade to re-create the natural heathland environment for the benefit of future generations, while continuing to maintain the course in best playing condition throughout the year."

Many courses would benefit from restoring some previously unmanaged habitats in non-play areas. This could include the re-introduction of typical local flora which were lost, often through insensitive management and the excessive use of herbicides during the 1960's and 70's. Regular or rotational cutting, coppicing and clearing, are usually the key elements of maintaining good quality habitats. The correct timing of operations to minimise interference with nature (eg nesting sites, or food sources), and allow the maximum benefits for wildlife (e.g. coppice management for birds such as warblers and nightingales), requires specialist knowledge.

Where the re-introduction of trees, shrubs or ground flora are planned, it is important to select species which are native to the local conditions. This maintains the authenticity of the landscape and provides habitat extension

which will be readily colonised by local wildlife species. If wild flower mixtures are sown they should be customised mixes containing only the most appropriate local species. The soil type, fertility level, moisture and proposed management can all be crucial to the success or failure of individual species within a mixture. Local conservation organisations are usually very willing to give advice on such issues.

Who said "Keen golfers are only interested in one thing – low scores"? How many golfers would complain at the occasional distraction by an unusual butterfly or two, or if they found a ball in the semi-rough surrounded by low-growing vetches, bird's-foot trefoil or ladies bedstraw? Where golf clubs have made information available to members on the value of their conservation management techniques, the well-informed golfer derives satisfaction and a better appreciation of the course environment. ■ *Bob Winfield advises golf clubs in the South of England on conservation and environmental management.*

DON'T BREAK YOUR BACK!

CLEARING UP AERATION CORES



GLEANER CORE PLUG PUSHER

- Quickly attaches to Greensmower
- Saves hours of back ache
- Quickly resume play after hollow coring
- Two section blade follows contours

SPECIAL OFFER – SAVE £100!

R.R.P. £895 NOW £795+vat FREE DELIVERY

PHONE NOW 0113 267 6000

GREENSWARD ENGINEERING COMPANY

Manor Farm, Otley Road, Adel, Leeds LS16 7AL



The rich flora at Temple Golf Club is the result of careful and consistent management

AD
REF
312