



**Lee Penrose, STRI, gives a round up
on the clubs who took part in the 2001
BIGGA Golf Environment Competition**

Environmental concerns

The votes have been counted and the results are in! This year's golf course environment competition has finally come to its end and proved to be the closest contest yet. The scale of environmental issues tackled by golf clubs is astounding; irrigation pond creation, woodland clearance and extensive species auditing are but a few examples of the kind of large scale commitment to environmental issues seen from this year's applicants. However, the projects unseen by the members and general public were the deciding factors in this year's competition; golf clubs across the British Isles are showing excellent initiative with regard to environmental improvement with projects ranging from office and clubhouse waste, energy saving to some very progressive composting schemes.

Of all the applications received by BIGGA only a few from each UK region could be visited for further consideration, so the tricky decision of who would play no further part in the contest was passed on to the ecology team at the Sports Turf Research Institute (STRI). Scoring was difficult and it seemed as though all the clubs should win the competition for their own special initiatives, however financial and time constraints forced a decision to be made and a selection of clubs from each region were duly chosen. The next stage was to visit the golf clubs in question.

Bradley Park Golf Club

Of the three northern clubs visited, Bradley Park Golf Club near Huddersfield is the smallest; a municipal course with less than two hundred members and only six green-staff, Bradley Park is a shining example to other small clubs. A dedicated Head Greenkeeper, Mr David Brierley, has performed wonders in his nine years at the club; his enthusiasm has manifested itself onto the course in the shape of 25,000 indigenous trees planted within the last few years and as a comprehensive species list of every plant and animal seen on site. Through relaxed rough cutting regimes and the introduction, and management, of wildlife ponds on the course Mr Brierley has ensured that a variety of flora and fauna call Bradley Park 'home'

Wilmslow Golf Club


Wilmslow Golf Club is a private members club in Mobberley, near Wilmslow, and was the second of the

northern clubs to be visited. The Head Greenkeeper at Wilmslow is Mr Stephen Oultram who is devoted to creating a natural looking and ecologically sound golf course. A visitor to this course can't help but be impressed by its situation in the surrounding countryside, Wilmslow reflects the adjacent areas to such a degree that, on a walk around the course, one could be forgiven for forgetting that you were at a golf club at all. Areas of rough containing a host of colourful grasses and wildflowers bank the fairways, and the greens and tees are surrounded by thriving woodlands; all this on a course with a playability factor second to none! Mr Oultram's enthusiasm is backed up by an ever-increasing knowledge of environmental issues and excellent turfgrass management skills.

Kenwick Park Golf Club

The third, and final club, to be visited in the north did not make judging the region any easier, being

of an equally high standard to the other two. Kenwick Park Golf Club in Louth, is a private club that has only been open for nine years and yet has already established itself as one of the most progressive environmental golf clubs in the country; being one of the first two English clubs to gain 'Going For Green' accreditation. Having set up an environmental panel in 1999 things are really moving forward at Kenwick Park. The panel (chaired by Mr Ian Shephard) raise their own funds for ecology projects through barbeques, quiz nights and other initiatives and deal with all the environmental problems at the club. Habitat creation has been the major project for the panel at Kenwick Park in the last two years, with the introduction of a woodland glade, skylark nesting areas, an island on a large pond for nesting water birds and an irrigation/wildlife pond planned for the near future; Kenwick Park is an oasis in an agricultural desert for birds, animals and flowers.



Above: St Andrews Links Trust. The five courses run by St Andrews Links Trust are committed to environmental good practice, minimal use of fertilisers and chemicals, record keeping and ecological rough management.





Below: Luffenham Heath Golf Club. The grassland rough is being gradually extended towards the playing line through sympathetic management



Parkstone Golf Club

Golf clubs in the south west of England maintained the high standard set by their northern counterparts. Parkstone Golf Club, in Poole, now has its own website dedicated to environmental issues (www.parkstonegolfclubgreens.fsnet.co.uk), hence their commitment to environmental issues is obvious even before a visit was made. Large scale tree clearances and heather/gorse heathland regeneration projects take up the majority of the greenstaff's time and effort; projects that are showing excellent results. The club are also well aware of the rarities in butterflies, reptiles and flowers present on their course and are especially proud of their colonies of bog asphodel, sundew and sand lizards; all of which are monitored annually.

Broadstone Golf Club

The other golf club visited in the south west was Broadstone Golf Club, a couple of miles up the road from

Parkstone in Poole. The staff there have an infectious enthusiasm for the environmental issues within the club and have captured the interest of the members remarkably well via organised nightjar and bat walks, posters, videos of wildlife found on the course and a notice board on which members can record wildlife sightings when playing golf (an idea that has worked surprisingly well!). A host of environmental topics have been addressed at Broadstone including progressive clubhouse management i.e. energy saving light bulbs and recycling, excellent waste oil and chemical reprocessing, and an organic matter composting scheme that is working well. An idea that should be applauded is the re-use of bunker sand as a habitat for reptiles and insects; when a bunker is replaced the old sand is placed into a 'pit' out of play and acts as a perfect home for sand lizards and adders. The list of extra habitats created on the course is long and impressive, but perhaps the most

impressive aspect of the club is the continuing influx of new projects that are being planned and undertaken successfully.

Beaconsfield Golf Club

The visits to the south east clubs continued in a similarly impressive way. The ecological sub-committee, headed by Bill Patterson, at Beaconsfield Golf Club have achieved a great deal over the last few years. Formal plantings of larch, pine and lelandii trees are being removed and replaced with indigenous tree species such as; ash, oak, holly, hazel and hornbeam and this is leading to a much more natural feel about the course with an increase in wildlife. The creation of extra rough areas around the fairways and relaxed mowing regimes in wooded sites are leading to the regeneration of heather, gorse and grass species on the course, which in turn is encouraging many butterflies and bird species. It is encouraging to see that

members at the club are taking an interest in the extra wildlife by noting any interesting sightings in a recording book, kept in the clubhouse. Environmental newsletters, display tables and a well known ecological committee also help the members to appreciate the movements forward and the importance of the ecological issues.

Berkhampstead Golf Club

As the course at Berkhamstead Golf Club is situated on common land, the greenstaff there have a particularly difficult job when it comes to some environmental issues. Therefore Gerald Bruce, course manager, and his team are dedicated to educating the local public about environmental management and that tree removal is sometimes necessary! Many heather management techniques have been tried in order to reinstate some of the lost heathland, and a bracken management plan is in place to stop bracken dom-



Above: Ipswich Golf Club. A variety of conservation projects are being implemented at Ipswich Golf Club



Above: Thorpeness Golf Club. A variety of habitats can be found within this predominantly heathland environment



Beaconsfield GC.
Improving gradation from fairway to deep rough

Below: Kilmacolm Golf Club. Interested members listen to Bob Taylor discussing habitat management. This Club has a very open and enlightened membership and displays a very high level of outreach



inating large areas. A commendable bird box erection and monitoring scheme is already in place and is a good indicator of how useful the course is to local wildlife. There is a good relationship between greenstaff and members when it comes to ecological issues, which is displayed by the annual clean up of the ponds on course undertaken by the members, supervised by Mr Bruce. Policies that are not seen by the public are equally important to the club such as minimal water and fertilizer usage on greens and energy reduction policies in the clubhouse.

Thorpeness Golf Club

The course at Thorpeness fits wonderfully into the surrounding countryside, and is a pleasure to walk around. Mr Ian Willett, course manager, has an enthusiastic membership and club backing him when it comes to environmental issues, thus the course is a haven for local wildlife. Thorpeness is lucky to neighbour

RSPB managed fenlands which adds extra birdlife to the course with such species as; bittern, osprey and even a white-tailed eagle recorded on the course! English Nature rewarded Mr Willett's enthusiasm with the designation of the course as an SSSI site, due to the diverse habitats within the course, and now the club work closely with English Nature to manage the course as ecologically soundly as possible.

Ipswich Golf Club

The dedication toward environmental issues of Ipswich Golf Club is unquestionable and is reflected by the employment of two full time conservation officers. Their hard work is fully backed by the club and appreciated by the members, and the results can be seen throughout the course by the incredible amount of habitat creation and varied flora and fauna. The diversity of habitat types within the course would impress even the most sceptical golfers, and



Wilmslow Golf Club. Improving year by year through the direction of an STRI Management Plan



a tour of the course with Mr Neil Sherman, conservation officer, and his staff is an eye opening experience even for an experienced ecologist. Two 'nature trails' have been created on the course, with associated information leaflets, for the members and public to walk and enjoy, and local schools are invited onto the course to walk the trails and learn about ecological issues. Ipswich should be an example to other clubs of the things that can be achieved with the dedication of a club and its members.

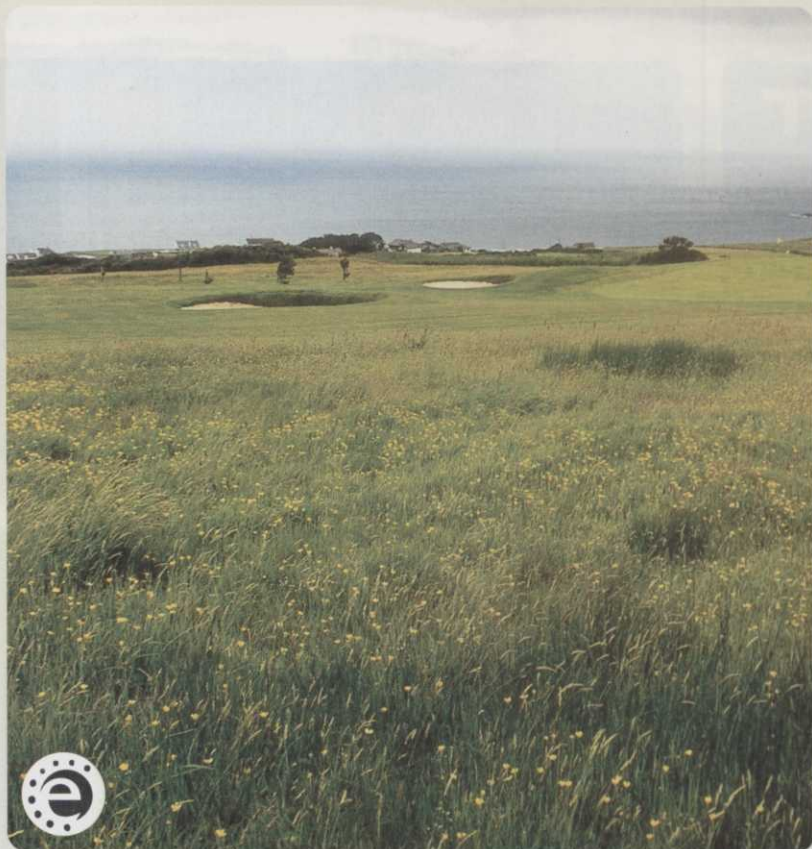
Luffenham Heath Golf Club

Much has been done in the way of habitat creation and conservation at The Luffenham Heath Golf Club, especially for the many species of butterflies found there, not least the black hairstreak butterfly – a rarity in the UK. Mr Fogg, Head Greenkeeper, has been with the club for thirty years now and has gained the total trust of the members,

hence extra rough area creation and woodland clearances are allowed to go ahead without complaint from the members (usually!). There is a small amount of heather beginning to regenerate near the third and fourth hole, something which the club are proud of and are doing their utmost to encourage more of, via careful management and making the members aware of its value.

The Luffenham Heath course has recently (1998) been awarded SSSI status due to its acid grasslands, heathland and its colony of black hairstreak butterflies, therefore the greenstaff work closely with English Nature to upkeep the areas of special interest on the course.

The planting of 400m of native hedgerow along the north of the course is an excellent project and will create homes and movement corridors for many songbirds, especially when taking into account the intensive agriculture in the surrounding areas.



Above: Cardigan Golf Club. Emphasis at Cardigan is being given to restoration of grasslands, gorse management, composting and minimalisation of fertilisers and water

Parkstone Golf Club. Annual tree removal and scrub control is gradually reinstating the true open heathland character of the course



Kilmacolm Golf Club

A long drive 'up the road' to Scotland was well worth while, as the golf clubs north of the border were, again, of an excellent standard. Over twenty interested club members, local councillors, residents and representatives of local nature groups turned out at Kilmacolm Golf Club for the judging of this year's competition. The interest displayed by these people is a credit to Mr Ronnie Bunting, Head Greenkeeper, and his club; he has successfully transformed the course into a haven for wildlife and gained the trust and respect of the club and its membership by many successful projects and constant liaisons with the members. The area is managed primarily as a golf course and has excellent putting surfaces and fairway definition, however it is also managed as though it were a nature reserve hence every decision is assessed for its impact on the environment and taken very seriously. Kilmacolm is only a twenty minute

drive away from the hustle and bustle of Glasgow centre, although visitors to the course feel as though they are miles from anywhere!

St Andrews Links Trust

All five of the courses at St Andrews Links Trust were entered into this year's BIGGA Golf Course Environment Competition, showing an extra keenness toward environmental issues. Of the five courses; the Eden Course is the most progressive in terms of habitat creation, with good gorse management techniques establishing several areas of great use for songbirds, invertebrates and reptiles. The most impressive aspect of St Andrews environmental policy is the attitude toward risk assessment and the recording of chemical and water usage. No expense has been spared in the setting up of a computerised irrigation system, the machine washdown areas are also a credit to the club; these ensure safe cleaning and disposal of all water and oil wastes.



Above: Broadstone Golf Club. Extensive areas of woodland have been cleared to reinstate the heathland, dragonfly ponds created and sand lizard and reptile habitats developed. Gradual progress has been made over a number of years



Berkhampstead Golf Club. Heathland restoration is a priority objective

Below: Bradley Park Golf Club. An excellent municipal course giving due consideration to sympathetic grassland and tree management



Cardigan Golf Club

The last region to be judged was Wales giving rise to a very progressive entry from Cardigan Golf Club. This club is devoted to allowing natural regeneration of gorse and grassland areas upon it, by following a newly created environmental management plan. The creation of three irrigation lakes is also a commendable and worthwhile project and will provide excellent habitats for a variety of wetland flora and fauna. Environmental training of staff, good communication with members and a sound waste management plan, including a high-quality composting scheme that is beginning to show commendable results establish this club as an example to clubs throughout the UK.

Finally ...

Choosing the winners from these outstanding clubs was not an easy task! However, inherent in every competition are winners and losers therefore, with quantitative scoring and much discussion, the very best of the clubs were selected to receive the prestige of winning the regional and national finalist awards. I hope that this article goes some way to show how much golf can do for the environment and that the real winners in this competition are the golf industry and the environment.

The following clubs were selected to receive awards:

- Northern winners**
Wilmslow Golf Club
- South east winners**
Ipswich Golf Club
- Welsh winners**
Cardigan Golf Club
- Scottish winners**
Kilmacolm Golf Club
- Overall winners**
Broadstone Golf Club