

ENVIRONMENT AWARDS 2002



Andrew Wood, of the STRI Environment team, reports on this year's competition and unveils the 2002 winning Club.

Wilmslow Golf Club's recent pond development. Winner of the prize for the best project.

R&A SPONSORED BIGGA GOLF ENVIRONMENT COMPETITION 2002.

It is that time of year again when the sealed green envelopes are opened and the results of the R&A sponsored BIGGA Environmental competition are announced. This is the seventh annual competition and although it is somewhat of a cliché it is fair to say that the standard has got stronger year on year throughout this period. Indeed it is likely that the application sent in by Ipswich Golf Club when they won the award in its original guise of Amazone Golf Environment Competition in 1995 would have struggled to progress to the second round of this year's competition. The sheer scale of ecological management going on at the majority of clubs in this year's competition is staggering. Environmental credentials are becoming increasingly polished and important habitats are being conserved, enhanced and created all over the country. What is most encouraging is that not only wildlife is benefiting from this work as the results are being enjoyed and appreciated by the golfer, the greenstaff and the general public are too. There is however just one major negative of all this progress, the competition just keeps getting increasingly difficult to judge!

All of this year's applications were studied by the Ecology team at STRI and scored out of a total of 40 points. Of these 17 clubs achieved a score of 25 or greater and were selected to progress to the regional finals. Those that didn't quite make the grade were given constructive feedback to encourage a stronger entry in future years. The next task was to carry out site visits to the selected clubs with a view to choosing regional finalists, the best individual project and a successor to Broadstone Golf Club who won the overall competition last year.

A summary of the findings from each region is provided below. A review of the criteria that clubs had to meet to be successful will be included in the next edition of the STRI International Turfgrass Bulletin.

SCOTLAND

Organisation is the key word at **St. Andrews Links Trust** where all the five courses were taken into account. The most progressive of these in terms of ecological management was the Eden Course. The former Head Greenkeeper of this course, Gordon Moir, is now Links Superintendent and his strong ecological credentials are prompting action throughout the Trust's courses. With the assistance of Jonathon Smith, of Scottish Wildlife Trust, environmental management plans are being drawn up for all five courses. An environmental working party has been assembled with at least one representative from each course.

Both St. Andrews and **Loch Lomond Golf Club** have spared no expense in terms of waste management and systems to accurately monitor chemical and water usage. Loch Lomond's commitment to conserving and enhancing the valuable habitats on the course is well demonstrated by the employment of two conservation officers who manage the woodlands, wetlands, and waterway areas in a way sympathetic to the golfer and the wildlife. The contribution that the Loch Lomond Invitational competition makes towards promoting golf in a good environmental light should not be underestimated.

Although not as large or illustrious as the three other entries in the Scottish region **Fortrose and Rosemarkie Golf Club** punches well above its weight in terms of environmental credentials and is very much proof that in this competition at least, size doesn't matter. Stuart Hogg, the Course Manager has developed an outstanding management plan that is realistic in terms of the work that can be done. This includes some splendid initiatives to reduce the use of chemicals and water on the course. There is also a rough grassland and gorse management strategy in place that is producing impressive results.

Owen Brown, Course Superintendent at the **Duke's Course**, must be golf's equivalent of Steve Irwin 'crocodile hunter' and not just because of his Australian accent. His knowledge of the wildlife on the course is impressive and his enthusiasm for all that is environmentally sound is infectious. Out on the course, on-going management schemes such as the filtering of drainage



One of two information boards at Bradley Park Golf Club visible to golfers and members of the public

water using newly created wetlands is appreciated by the golfer and ecologist alike. The grassland roughs and woodland plantations have been managed such that the holes have great definition and ecologically valuable corridors are created throughout the course. In an excellent communication initiative a two page hole by hole guide to the ecology of the course has recently been included in the club's course planner.

NORTHERN ENGLAND

The organisation of ecological management at **Kenwick Park Golf Club** sets this club apart from others. The 'Environment Panel' is a committee held in high regard by the club which demonstrates sustainability by raising its own funds for projects through events such as quiz nights, club competitions and night golf. An example of the Environment Panel's input into on-course matters is the way it influenced a change in the design of the Club's new irrigation reservoir from a rectilinear layout to a much less formal looking style. As a result of this input a far greater wildlife habitat will now develop. The reservoir now ensures that in future years the club will be completely self-sufficient for water.

Only 25 years ago, the site at **Bradley Park Golf Club** (a small municipal course) was agricultural land and quite sterile in terms of wildlife. Today, largely through the commitment of Head Greenkeeper, David Brierley, the course has a very natural feel and pockets of great ecological value. One such area is the pond on the second hole that is split into two sections of different depths. This suits a large range of vegetation, which encourages an increased diversity of animal species. The most impressive recent initiative is the creation of two information boards which describe the wildlife present on the course. These are positioned in view of golfers and members of the general public who use a footpath on the course.

Of all the clubs visited during the course of the competition, **Wirral Ladies' Golf Club** is the most progressive in terms of composting. Several grass clippings bays have been constructed in secluded areas around the course. When full, clippings are transported to a central location, mixed with organic material and composted. A tarpaulin is used to keep the heap at the optimum moisture content and prevent any run off occurring.

In terms of habitat management, the club is achieving great success in restoring areas of heather and maintaining woodland and gorse as part of a phased programme. A splendid portfolio of this work is being created that will be of great value as a means of communication with members when displayed in the Clubhouse.

Steve Oultram, Course Manager of **Wilmslow Golf Club** should be highly commended for his sheer dedication and enthusiasm. The management of the rough grasslands is part of a long term improvement programme which is

producing impressive results. The rough is cut annually and a local farmer is engaged to remove haylage from the course, over 50 big bales this year. The major change in the landscape of the course over the past year has been the creation of a pond on the 16th hole. From the design stage through to the marginal planting after construction, everything has been done to a superb standard and the pond is a valuable addition to the other outstanding habitats on the course.

SOUTH EAST ENGLAND

Aldeburgh, Thorpeness Hotel and **Ipswich** were three golf clubs within close proximity to each other that all made it through to the South East regional final. All three are situated upon the Suffolk Sandlings and have large areas of land well out of play. All are responsible custodians of ecologically important, acidic lowland heath. At Aldeburgh, management is carried out that enhances and restores grassland, woodland, gorse and a small amount of heather on the course. The Course Manager and his team have a good understanding of how to manage these areas and control invading vegetation such as bracken, brambles and rank grass species on an impressively large scale.

At Thorpeness Hotel and Golf Course, Course Manager, Ian Willett, has created a solid environmental management plan, with assistance from several ecology-based organisations and a keen member, Ray Hardinge. Ray has produced extensive species lists for the course which includes the red data species Woodlark and Nightjar. The club has shown the commitment to enter into a Countryside Stewardship Award that funds much of the ecological management work. As the club has only six greenkeeping staff, it has sought the services of the Suffolk Sandlings Project to carry out certain schemes including some large scale and highly successful bracken clearance.

Although Ipswich Golf Club has limited resources the club fully supports the Course Manager's appointment of two conservation officers. This manpower has enabled the club to make huge strides in terms of environmental enhancement of a diverse range of habitats. The publicising of past successful management means that the team are not afraid of removing large areas of vegetation such as woodland, gorse and bracken in order to re-instate areas of grassland heath or heather. The flagship area of ecological management at present is a heather stand within the carry of the 13th hole. This was turf stripped in March 2001 following a severe heather beetle infestation. After only 17 months, the area now is almost 100% covered with healthy young heather plants.

Rookwood Golf Club is a five year old municipal club that has outstanding environmental credentials. The development of the golf course was an issue of great contention as it was effectively built on land originally



The reflection of a screen at Warren Golf Club has reduced the disturbance of resting and feeding birds.



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designated as a nature reserve. Sceptics are now being forced to look at golf courses in a new light, as the increase in ecological value of the site has been outstanding. The club has planted approximately 80,000 mainly native trees and shrubs and developed wild flower areas in roughs which give the course a very natural feel. It has an interactive website:

www.rookwoodgolfcourse.co.uk with a section devoted to nature conservation where golfers can register any wildlife they have identified on the course in a "Nature Log".

A strong emphasis on staff training and the development of a comprehensive environmental management plan has been the foundation for some excellent work carried out at **Gerrards Cross Golf Club**. Recent management includes pond development, the clearing of rides through woodlands and general woodland edge management. All this work has had benefits to the course from both a golf and a wildlife viewpoint. In terms of risk assessment and waste management, the club is now at an excellent standard after recent improvements in its chemical and diesel storage facilities.

SOUTH WEST ENGLAND AND WALES

Bath Golf Club was one of a number in this year's competition that has entered into a Countryside Stewardship Agreement with DEFRA which largely dictates the club's ecological management. This involves the protection and management of many features of historical importance including Iron age field systems and a Roman fort. The club is also committed to the enhancement of the Cotswold grasslands and the protection of its resident populations of Greater and Lesser Horseshoe Bats. The club has initiated grazing out of play which is quickly improving the grassland habitat. The cow dung attracts insects which provide a food source for the bats.

The club has excellent waste management credentials and Course Manager, Guy Woods, has initiated an impressive recycling programme.

The large turnout of members and staff for the visit to **Warren Golf Club** in Dawlish clearly indicated the enthusiasm for environmental issues at this club. The club lies on a sand spit that is one of only two UK sites for the Warren Crocus. Warren has many ecological designations and a large number of organisations have contributed to the club's Site Management Statement. This suits the golf club despite ensuring it abides by strict management policies including minimal use of chemicals on the course.

The 14th tee is adjacent to an important foreshore roosting and nesting site. To reduce disturbance levels, a screen has been placed around one side of the tee and the retrieval of golf balls from this area is prohibited.

The most striking thing about **Parkstone Golf Club** in Poole is the scale of the ecological management that has taken place over the past few years. This has been concentrated on the removal of woodland and scrub areas with the

intention of reinstating grassland heath and especially areas of heather. Opening up such areas has had benefits for golf as well as the wildlife of the course. Increased light and air movement has improved playing surfaces and vastly increased areas of heather where Adders and Sand lizards often bask on the south facing slopes.

A stream and several springs feed two well managed lakes on the course which make the club self sufficient for irrigation water and provide an excellent wildlife habitat.

A diverse range of important habitats were found at **Cardigan Golf Club** including grassland, hedgerows, water bodies and areas of gorse and scrub. All of these habitats are subjected to continual improvement through the following of a comprehensive management plan. A 60m hedge planted last February will eventually provide food, shelter and a nesting site for birds as well as screening the maintenance sheds. A photographic record of the improvements made is a valuable tool for promoting future ecological initiatives. The club is highly committed to composting of grass clippings, hollow tine cores and other organic waste. This is a major part in the Club's push towards sustainability as it is hoped to eventually use the end product as top dressing.

AND THE WINNERS ARE...

In Scotland the size, course type and management structure of the four finalists was unbelievably different for each entrant and this made judging all the more difficult. After much deliberation, Fortrose and Rosemarkie Golf Club were just pipped to the post by the Duke's Course. In Northern England there was almost a four way tie with only one point between all the regional finalists. However, Bradley Park just came out on top. In The South East, Ipswich just edged out Thorpeness Hotel and Golf Course for the second year running. These two competition stalwarts will need to continue improving if they are to keep ahead of first time entrants, Aldeborough, Rookwood and Gerrards Cross in future years. Parkstone took the honours in a hard fought South West and Wales Region though again this club, Warren and Cardigan must be aware of new entrant Bath making impressive progress.

After much deliberation it was decided that Wilmslow would receive the prize for the best individual project during the past year. This was for the pond the club created on its 16th hole which is already proving a resounding success from an ecological viewpoint.

Ironically, it was **Ipswich** who won the overall competition, some seven years after taking the title for the first time. Many congratulations should go to all involved at the Club for their hard work that has had to be put in to become the first two-time winner of the competition. I'm certain that they will be the first to agree that this second success hasn't been easily achieved and that they, like a great many clubs, have come a long way in terms of ecological management in the last seven years.



The Flagship area of regenerated heather on Ipswich Golf Club



The purchase of a self contained washing system has improved Loch Lomond Golf Club's Environmental credentials.



Grassland rough at the Duke's course gives good hole definition and provides wildlife corridors.