



Golf Environment
Competition

IF AT FIRST YOU DON'T SUCCEED...

Andrew Wood of STRI's Ecology Unit assesses The BIGGA Golf Environment Competition 2003

The anxious wait is over for the Nation's greenest Greenkeepers as its time to announce the winners of the BIGGA Golf Environment Competition 2003. The competition has undergone a slight revamp this year largely due to the introduction of two new sponsors, Scotts and Syngenta along with the competition's patron the R&A. The additional financial support that these two companies have provided has enabled an increased level of feedback to entrants and the introduction of some new prizes.

As ever the standard was high and all entrants this year are worthy of reward for the commitment they are showing in terms of ecological management. Yet even with the introduction of new prizes the format of the competition ultimately dictates that there are more disappointed clubs than successful ones.

What is interesting, however, is to see how clubs react to this disappointment. In the past there have been clubs who, after not winning at the first attempt, have taken their bats home and never entered the competition again. However, other clubs such as Kenwick Park, St Andrews Links Trust and Thorpeness Hotel have taken the knocks, assessed where they can improve, made improvements and re-entered year after year. These clubs are well aware that success in this competition, just as in ecological management is rarely gained instantly and that perseverance is the key.

It is therefore fitting that all three of these clubs have been rewarded with success this year with Kenwick Park taking the Overall Winners title.

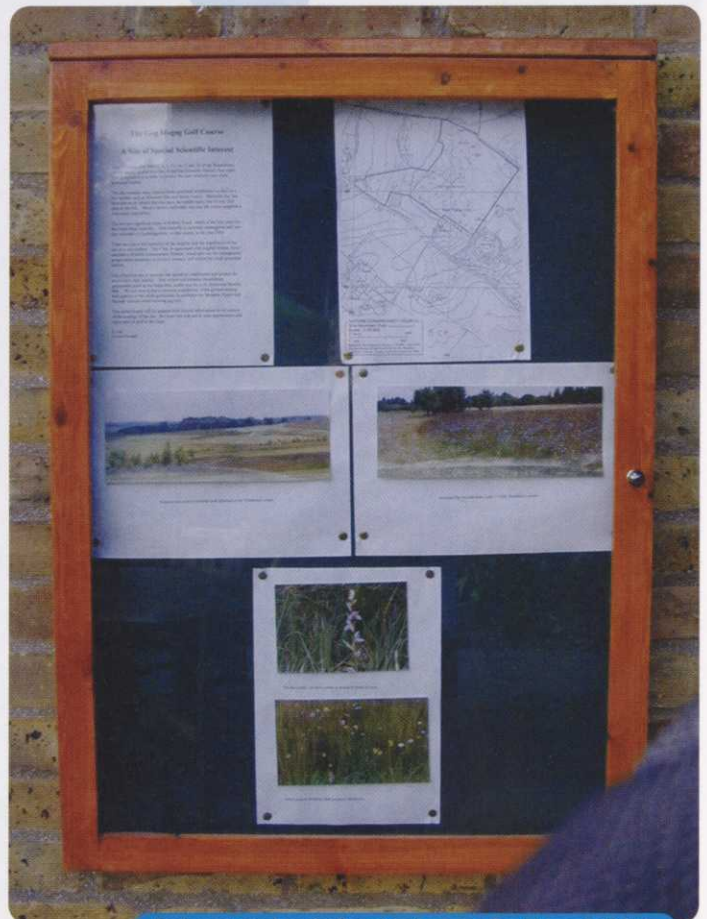
The Ecology Team at STRI studied all this year's entries and made a shortlist of 16. Those clubs which didn't make the second round were given advice on how to put together a stronger entry in future years. The next task was then to carry out site visits to the selected clubs with a view to choosing the prize winners.

SCOTLAND

The best new entrant in Scotland was Brighouse Bay Golf Club in Kirkcudbright. This Club is privately owned and functions largely as a facility for the Gillespie Leisure Holiday Park complex. The Club's main nature conservation projects thus far have been the improvement of rough grasslands through the annual cutting and removal of vegetation and the creation of a number of ponds and reed beds. These water bodies have a great conservational value, they enhance the character of the course and the reed bed areas clean up waste water from the holiday park before it is re-used for irrigation on the course. Solid waste management and energy efficiency are exemplary at the Club and this has been a major factor in the holiday park gaining a number of environmental tourism awards including the David Bellamy (Gold Award).



Establishment of a reed bed filtration system that cleans up waste water from a holiday park before it is re-used at Brighouse Bay Golf Club. This is also an excellent conservation initiative



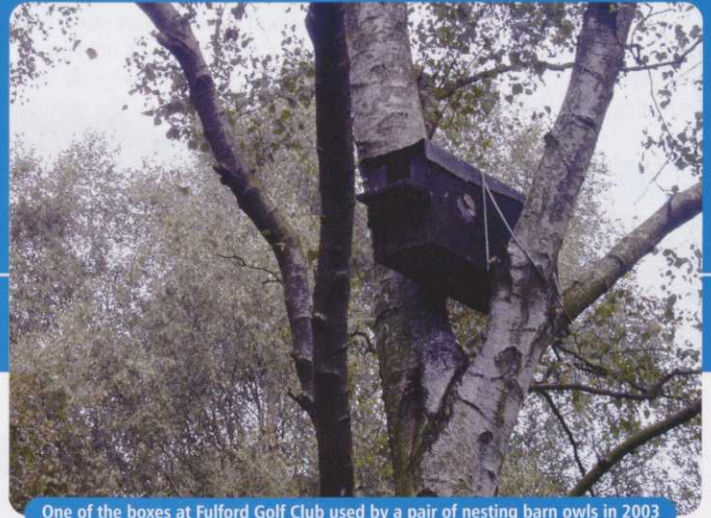
Ecology Notice board adjacent to 1st tee at Gog Magog Golf Club

Although St. Andrews Links Trust encompasses 99 holes, the diversity of habitats on the five courses is limited. That said, a comprehensive Ecological Management Plan is being developed to ensure that everything possible is done to conserve the links which act as a stable habitat for locally important, nationally scarce and declining species such as swift, whitethroat, song thrush, yellow hammer, linnets, bullfinch and grey partridge. In just a few years under the guidance of Links Superintendent, Gordon Moir, the Trust has become major contender in this competition. All of the Trust's employees now appear to be pulling strongly in the same direction both on and off the course. In terms of waste management, all organic waste is composted and programmes are in place for the re-cycling of bottles, cans, paper, waste oil and printer cartridges.

On arriving at the Duke's Course, St. Andrews, the course was as impressive as last year but there were a number of areas of concern regarding a major change in direction as to how the ecological management of the course is to be managed, with the aim of redirecting maintenance to increase sward density and create more visually appealing surfaces.



Waste paper/cardboard recycling facility at St. Andrews Links Trust



One of the boxes at Fulford Golf Club used by a pair of nesting barn owls in 2003

The main focus for nature conservation at the Loch Lomond Golf Club continues to be the programme of woodland enhancement. Prior to course construction the woodlands were ecologically poor yet through the employment of two fully qualified woodland officers their quality is improving rapidly. In addition to enhancing existing grassland rough through an annual cutting and removal programme, the Club constantly review opportunities to expand areas of rough. The Club are progressing with the initiation of a formal composting system. Grass clippings, formerly stockpiled on course, are now collected using trailers that tow behind the John Deere triple mowers. The clippings are brought back to a composting area which is about to be extended. The Club also has a state of the art Waste 2 Water system that allows water to be recycled within its impressive wash down facility.

NORTHERN ENGLAND

Marriot Worsley Park Hotel And Country Club was one of three new entrants visited in the Northern England region. The Club is a great example of how relatively young golf clubs can be managed ecologically. Some 40,000 whips, planted during course construction four years ago have thrived and thinning is now a priority in addition to other ecological management such as Rhododendron clearance from mature woodlands and pond re-instatement. With such a large ecological work schedule it is important that the Club prioritises correctly and it has sought expert advice from sources such as the English Nature/EGU/STRI free ecological advice service and the assessors of the Green Globe Environmental Awards Scheme. The Club is one of the first in the Country to gain this award. The Marriot group which owns the club has excellent environmental credentials which promote the virtues of sustainability and therefore this Club is outstanding in terms of recycling and energy saving.

Separating Fulford and York Golf Clubs was the most difficult decision in this year's competition. Their close proximity to each other meant that both supported very similar habitats and the Ecological management at both clubs is driven by extremely enthusiastic Chairmen of Green. In addition both clubs share their greatest ecological management problem. Until recently they were in danger of losing their original lowland heath character, due largely to tree invasion. Today on both courses programmes of woodland enhancement are in full swing with large scale Silver Birch removal a priority. This has produced many benefits in addition to ecological ones. Greenkeepers have found that the turf quality has improved dramatically where felling has increased light and air movement around tees, fairways and greens. The golfer too appreciates the increased aesthetic appeal of the course and the heightened sense of anticipation created by rides which have been cut through the woodland. While both clubs have created habitats specifically with fauna in mind, Fulford leads the way with the erection of over one hundred bird boxes which range in size to suit different species. These have had a great deal of success but the crown jewel is the use of two owl boxes by a pair of nesting Barn Owls. It is testament to the positive link between golf and wildlife that this rare species (only 3,200 pairs nationwide) is successfully breeding at Fulford.

Wilmslow Golf Club supports a large number of habitats with a high conservation value. Each year our judges note how the programme of grassland improvement is eliminating rank grasses such as Yorkshire Fog from

the sward and encouraging finer grasses which require less management, aid ball retrieval and have a greater species diversity. For areas out of play Course Manager, Steve Oultram, has purchased a hay bailer so that when the rough receives its annual cut he can easily remove the vegetation from site, thus lowering the nutrient level of the soil.

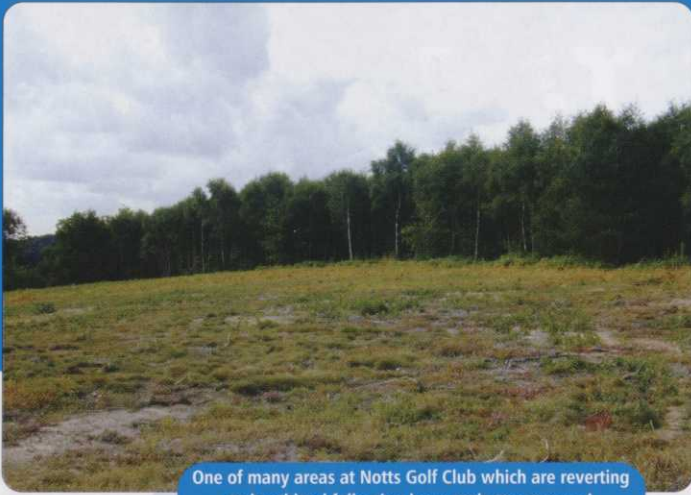
SOUTH EAST ENGLAND

Beaconsfield Golf Club has excellent management programmes in place to enhance the quality of woodland, grassland roughs and water bodies throughout the course. Communication throughout the Club is excellent. Indeed on the day of the visit Bill Paterson, the Head Greenkeeper was creating a photographic display for the Club's Open Evening. This is a well attended annual event which educates members in the principles behind the Club's turfgrass and ecological management objectives. Bill also writes ecology based articles for the Club notice board and promotes golf's green credentials to the local public by taking the local walking group on guided walks of the course.

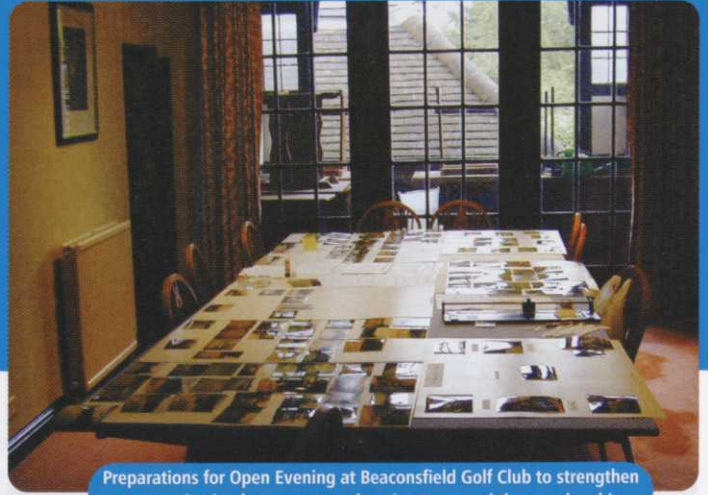
Wildlife recording by keen ecologist Ray Hardinge continues to be the backbone of ecology management at Thorpeness Hotel and Golf Club. When his lists are compiled the location of species is taken into account when Course Manager, Ian Willett, plans the management of the course. Such is the conservation value of this course in terms of bird life alone that the hotel has launched bird watching weekends as a new business venture. The course continually suffers from rabbit damage despite control through shooting, yet this problem is reduced by the filling of scrape holes with organic chicken manure. The strong odour deters the rabbits from areas where the manure is applied.

The year 2002/2003 has seen the introduction of an environmental sub-committee at Gog Magog Golf Club. The Course Manager, Kerran Daly, together with the new committee has developed a highly impressive and comprehensive Environmental Management Plan, which encompasses communication, conservation, landscape, turfgrass management and waste disposal. Communication is good and the membership appears to be supportive of the club's environmental objectives. The main emphasis of ecological work has been the improvement of chalk grassland through cutting and removal of vegetation and the felling of invasive scrub, primarily Hawthorn. The Club acts as a responsible custodian for a number of locally, nationally, and internationally rare plants such as Kidney Vetch, Perennial Flax and Moon Carrot.

Cottesmore Golf and Country Club is the first Club from the "American Golf" stable to enter the BIGGA competition. It has recently had an environmental management plan drawn up by employee, Abbey Miller. The plan is of a high standard and should stand the club in good stead for the future. Indeed it is also possible that it may be used as a template for the other 23 American Golf Clubs in the UK. The Club has carried out much work on the course in terms of improving grassland, woodland and water bodies. This work along with the erection of many species-specific nesting boxes is testament to the influence Abbey has had on this course. Yet the true test for Cottesmore is to see whether it can continue improving now she has departed.



One of many areas at Notts Golf Club which are reverting to heathland following large scale tree removal



Preparations for Open Evening at Beaconsfield Golf Club to strengthen communication between greenkeeping team and the membership

MIDLANDS AND SOUTH WEST

Kenwick Park Golf Club came extremely close to winning the overall competition last year. Since then the club has addressed some remaining few problems and is now the perfect example of how golf courses can be successfully managed for both golf and as havens for wildlife. This has been achieved over many years by bringing together all the things the judges are looking for in this competition; organisation, education, communication, consultation and most importantly dedication.

Charnwood Forest Golf Club was the only nine hole course that made it through to the last 16 of this year's competition. While the size of the Club means there are constraints on funding for ecological management, the enthusiasm of the Chairman of Green, Gary Thurman, and the greenkeeping team more than compensates for this. The Club has developed a five-year management plan which ensures that the enhancements of the many habitats on the course are long term. Head Greenkeeper, Tim Allard, has

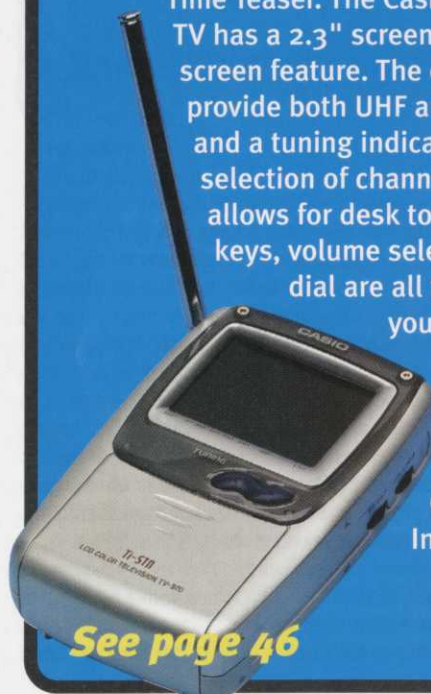
experimented with a number of different techniques for heather restoration and is now getting good results from turf stripping and the spreading of brushings, harvested from other stands on the course.

In terms of sheer scale of physical improvements on the course, no club could match Notts Golf Club, Hollinwell this year where the work has to be seen to be believed. Vast tracts of low ecological value woodland have been cleared and turf stripped to encourage the restoration of heather and gorse. Aftercare treatment involves sapling removal and the use of a roller as a bracken basher. Yet some of the areas of tree clearance are simply too large to manage and therefore the Club have recently embarked on a sheep grazing scheme. With works occurring on such a dramatic scale it is crucial that there is good communication between the Greenkeeper, the Greens Committee and the membership. This appears to be the case and the membership are fully supportive of the push to re-capture the course's original heathland character. The benefits are obvious when one considers



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the improvement that has occurred in the Club's "Golf World" ranking over the past five years. During this time, the Notts Club has jumped from 47th to 25th and the magazine's assessors have stated that one of the major factors behind this has been the enhancement of the natural areas of the course.

At Minchinhampton Golf Club the Courses Manager, Paul Worster has assembled an enthusiastic team who work with a comprehensive Ecological Management Plan, which prioritises non-native tree removal, the enhancement of grassland rough and the competent management of hedgerows and water bodies. The relatively new Cherrington course has been built on a site with long stretches of dry stone wall which were in a poor state of repair. The Club fully appreciates the cultural value of these walls within the Cotswold landscape and has made strides towards its objective to re-build all 1.5km. The club is excellent in terms of energy saving

and waste management. Through consultation with the composting association it has arrived at a novel and cost effective composting technique. This along with the Notts Club's sheep grazing scheme and other worthy projects will be described when the best new initiative results are announced in the January issue of Greenkeeper International.

Minchinhampton were among many clubs that have stated just how much benefit they had got from entering the BIGGA competition this year in terms of knowledge, pride and as a way of assessing what they have achieved and what is still to do. In essence then all entrants are winners, though the clubs listed below take the prestige and the prizes. Congratulations to the winners and to those not amongst the prizes a message from the Clubs at Kenwick Park, St. Andrews and Thorpeness: "If at first you don't succeed try, try, try again."

And the Winners are...

AWARD	CLUB	PRIZE
Overall Winner	Kenwick Park Golf Club	£2000 and a Weather Station
Scotland	St. Andrews Links Trust	£500
Northern England	York Golf Club	£500
Runner up in winners region	Notts Golf Club	£500
South East England	Thorpeness Hotel and Golf Club	£500
New Entrant Prize	Minchinhampton Golf Club	£500
Best New Initiative Prize	To be announced in the January issue of Greenkeeper International.	

Kenwick Park Golf Club will be featured in the magazine sometime next year.

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