

# Notts Golf Club Takes the Initiative



Andrew Wood of the STRI's Ecology Unit outlines the initiatives of the four runners up in the New Initiative Category of the BIGGA Golf Environment Competition followed by that of the winner, Notts Golf Club.



Golf Environment  
Competition

With the presentation of the 2003 BIGGA Golf Environment Competition prizes at BTME & ClubHouse fast approaching, it is time to announce the results of the Best New Initiative Award. The majority of clubs that entered the 2003 competition had undertaken at least one initiative within the last year. From bat box erection to guided ecology walks for members, each initiative was a credit to the club that put it forward. Yet there could only be one winner and after much deliberation the judges decided it should go to a club that has recently introduced Hebridean Sheep to the course, as part of its heathland restoration programme.



▲ The Minchinhampton Mix

## MINCHINHAMPTON GOLF CLUB'S WIND-ASSISTED COMPOSTING

Several clubs in the competition this year had composting programmes in place to recycle their organic waste. On many courses, the composting takes the form of a large heap that breaks down over many years in a hidden-away part of the course. However Paul Worster, Courses Manager at Minchinhampton, has addressed the issue of composting in a totally different way and the result has gained a place in our top five new initiatives.

The first clever move on Paul's part was to seek advice from the Compost Association who made a visit to the club and suggested creating a system that would speed up the composting process. The base of the composting area has been specially constructed so that a fan can draw air through a perforated plastic pipe located beneath the heap. The fan, which is operated for just a few hours each day, greatly increases air movement within the heap and this has two positive effects. The first is that the extra oxygen moving through the pile is utilised by the microbes, which break down the organic waste into soil. The second is that the air movement

prevents the pile from getting over wet, enabling it to be left uncovered without fear of nutrient run off or leaching.

Due to the increased rate of organic breakdown, the composting process has been found to now only take a matter of months rather than years. Therefore all the club's organic waste can be dealt with in a relatively small area. This even includes the club's waste cardboard from the clubhouse and pro-shop. Previously, this cardboard was costing the club £1,500 per year to dispose of. Now it is stored in a cage next to the heap and periodically the contents are fed into the Amazone Groundkeeper, which shreds the cardboard before it is mixed into the pile. The end product is of good quality and the club uses it as mulch on flower beds and around shrubs and trees. However, this uses just a fraction of the output and so the compost has been made available to the members at 50p per bag with proceeds going back into the greenkeeping budget. In addition to this, the £1500 saved in waste disposal more than pays for the small amount of electricity needed to power the fan.

### COTTESMORE GOLF AND COUNTRY CLUB'S HABITAT CREATION

This golf club did not figure as a regional winner in this year's traditional Environment Competition, yet by no means did this rule it out from figuring in the best new initiative section. In terms of habitat creation, the Cottesmore course is like a showroom for 'Boxes-R-Us' as there are man made homes for many different wildlife species on this course. Bats, birds of all sizes, hedgehogs and harvest mice are just a few of the wildlife species encouraged on the course. All boxes are thoughtfully positioned with careful consideration given to feeding grounds, climatic and human influences and potential predators. That said, there are a few bird boxes in positions, which are highly visible to the membership. This is a good method of publicising the greenkeeping team's commitment to the nature on the course. Another aspect of this initiative that the judges admired was the value for money of the initiative. An old corrugated tin sheet placed in a cove for use by reptiles costs nothing, as does an old tennis ball on a stick which makes a perfect nest for a harvest mouse. A great deal of ingenuity was evident at Cottesmore which has proven that it is not just golf clubs with big budgets that are in the reckoning for this prize.

### LOCH LOMOND GOLF CLUB'S RHODODENDRON CLEARANCE

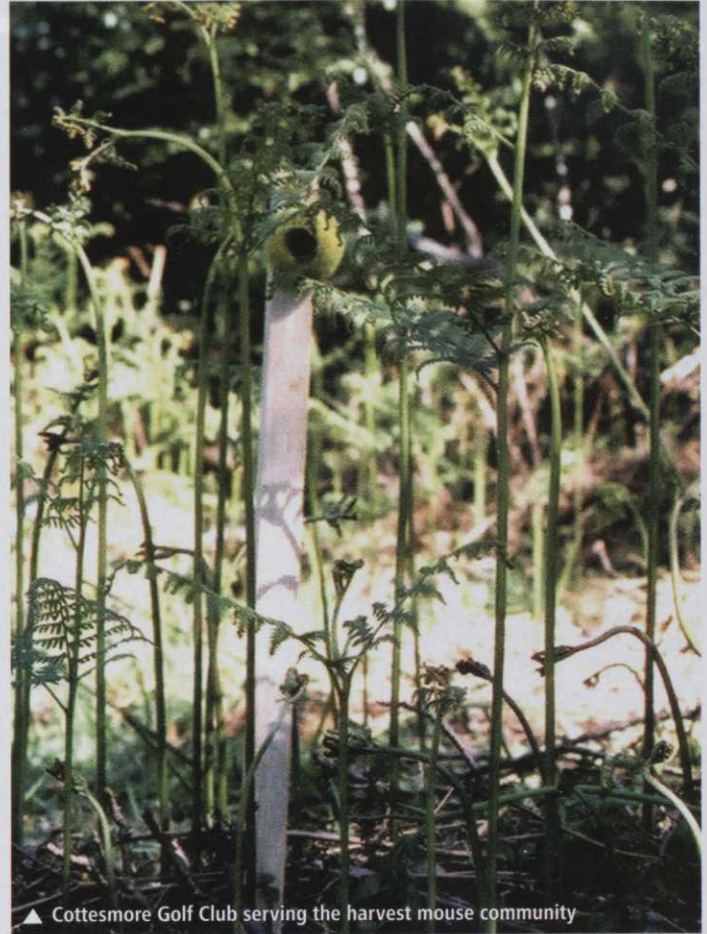
The first of two splendid initiatives in Scotland was at Loch Lomond Golf Club, where a large scale project to clear an area of woodland of the non-native rhododendron has commenced. Historically, the unwanted rhododendron has been removed physically by chainsaw and operator. This process was followed by herbicide applications of either Imazapyr or Glyphosate over two seasons to prevent re-growth.

The aim of the Loch Lomond's initiative was to investigate whether the rhododendron could be cleared in a way which was less labour intensive, less physically demanding and less dependent on the use of follow up chemicals. Therefore research commenced on finding a rapid technique to remove as much of the rhododendron as possible, including roots, in order to eradicate the plants and avoid the need for follow-up spraying.

In 2002, the Club located a contract team who possessed a flail chipper and mulching machine, which could be utilised to extremely good effect to eradicate rhododendrons. The machine was brought on to the site during September 2002 and June 2003 and a total area of between four and five hectares was cleared. This work will continue over the next two seasons or so, where it is envisaged a further seven hectares will be cleared. A major benefit of this equipment is the extent of work that can be carried out during any one operation and the reduction in the large amount of aftercare work that would otherwise be involved. The Club, however, are not sure as to the effect of leaving chippings over the surface and are setting up a series of trials to look at the benefits of leaving chippings and



▲ An area of the rhododendron clearance at Loch Lomond Golf Club



▲ Cottesmore Golf Club serving the harvest mouse community

waste as compared with clearing and re-scraping back to the underlying humus layer.

Unfortunately, even though the areas of woodland have been cleared of the rhododendrons their legacy is a high level of toxicity in the soil that will inhibit the ability of native grasses, trees and flowers to regenerate. However, over time, a large-scale improvement in the ecological value of this woodland will occur due to both the research and practical work that the Loch Lomond Club have carried out.

### ST ANDREWS LINKS TRUST'S DRIVE FOR SUSTAINABILITY

St Andrews Links Trust has undertaken not one but many special initiatives within the last year. For this part of the competition they have been grouped collectively as initiatives which promote the Trust's drive towards greater sustainability.

Only a few years ago the Trust was, dare I say, playing catch-up in this area. Yet, perhaps due to the self-evaluation required to enter this competition and the Committed to Green programme, the Trust has turned this weakness into a real strength. In 2002 the Trust requested an energy efficiency audit, which was subsequently carried out by the Scottish Energy Efficiency Office. By 2003, 95% of the recommendations published in the audit were completed. The work had involved using more energy efficient lighting, improving gas regulation and use, and improving the way in which the irrigation-pumping stations operate. Out on the course, sprinkler heads were changed from 360° to 180°, the petrol/diesel buggies have been replaced with Yamaha electric buggies and a free shuttle bus is now in place to transport golfers between the clubhouse and different site facilities. This will not only ease congestion but will significantly reduce pollution.

The administration side of the Trust is turning green at a rapid rate thanks to the influence of Gordon Moir, the Links Superintendent, and his Secretary, Lorna Marroney. The Links Trust has this year made a concerted effort to contact as many companies as is practically possible to request that no junk mail is forwarded without prior consent. This, although still in its infancy, is already reducing the amount of waste, which would otherwise be accumulated. Everyone involved within the St Andrews Links Trust now recycles and members (seasonal ticket holders) are even bringing their own cardboard and paper for recycling. Even the Links News is now printed on chlorine free 100% recycled paper and there are regular articles explaining how the environmental credentials of the course are improving.

Grass clippings from greens tees and aprons are collected at all times, while those produced from fairway cutting are collected 80% of the time. These clippings are stored briefly on the course before being transported to central storage sites. There they are mixed with other organic materials and composted, to be used again as divot mix, top dressing or construction material.



▲ The cardboard recycling station at St. Andrews Links Trust

### NOTTS GOLF CLUB'S SHEEP GRAZING SCHEME

The course at the Notts Golf Club (Hollinwell) forms an ecologically valuable oasis of heathland habitat within a landscape now dominated by intensive agriculture. However, until recently, the heathland character of the course was in gradual decline as large areas of land out of play had been allowed to revert to scrub woodland. In 1997 Course Manager, Philip Stain, introduced the club to The Sherwood Forest Trust, an organisation able to provide advice and finance towards the restoration of this important habitat. The Trust provided the club with information and support sufficient to convince the members that it was time to act. The Club heeded the message and entered into a 10 year long Countryside Stewardship Scheme, putting into place a radical management plan. The plan has been created with the aims of preventing further decline and restoring vast tracts of heathland back to their former glory.

Philip is well aware that the benefits of this work are two fold. "From an ecological viewpoint the work is very important, Nottinghamshire has lost 95% of its heathland and it is therefore vital that the club acts as a competent custodian of this important habitat." Yet he has also noted the benefit to the club, both from a greenkeeping and a playing point of view. "The removal of dense, ecologically poor woodland from areas close to play has resulted in increased light and air movement throughout the course, which in turn has led to an improvement in the quality of playing surfaces." In addition, the course has re-captured much

of the former heathland character with spectacular views appearing from where before there were only dense stands of spindly birch trees. Ian McLachlan, Chairman of the Greens Committee, is pleased with the recent increase in prestige of the Course, which he feels can be attributed to the heathland restoration work. "In the past five years the Club's Golf World ranking has risen from 47th to 25th and the assessors stated this rise was largely due to the improved character of the course."

The fact that the restoration work has been ongoing for a number of years makes this project as a whole ineligible for the New Initiative award. However, one new initiative introduced this year as part of the scheme did catch the judges' eye. This was the introduction of sheep grazing.

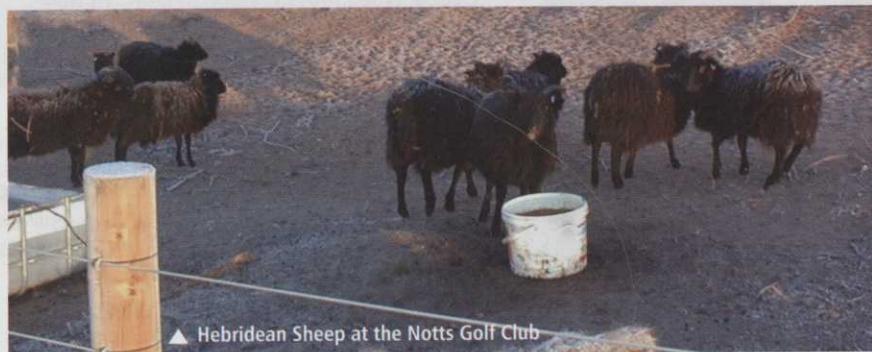
The club has cleared land on such a large scale that it has simply not got the resources to prevent scrub regeneration, especially the growth of self-set birch saplings. When discussing this problem with a representative from the Sherwood Forrest Trust, Ian McLachlan flippantly mentioned the prospect of using Hebridean sheep and the initiative was born. Any doubts that the membership had regarding the idea were allayed through an explanation of the benefits of sheep grazing and a description of the support that the Club had managed to gain for the project. Adam Goodall, of the Sherwood Forest Trust, took on the role of Project Organiser. He secured matched-funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund for the 2.5 Km of fencing required to keep the sheep within two grazing areas on the course. These areas were out-of-play and combined covered approximately 12 ha.

The Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust provided the 55 sheep, (known as the flying flock) which were introduced to the course in September. The Hebridean breed was specially selected as they will graze woody vegetation such as birch saplings, thus preventing scrub regeneration. In addition, this breed will selectively eliminate problematic grass species from the heathland sward, such as Purple Moor Grass. The current plan is that the sheep will remain on the course for several years until the heathland has re-established and stabilised. They may then be moved to another section of the course or indeed another forward thinking golf club such as Notts that has the vision, the contacts and the drive to undertake such a superb initiative.

The New Initiatives Award has been a highly successful new category within the BIGGA competition and though it has been won by a large scale, well supported project this year, there is nothing to say that a small, self financed, well thought out and well executed initiative won't take the award next year. What the judges are looking for is ingenuity and inspiration, so if you have a cunning plan that you intend to execute next year, make sure you get the 2004 BIGGA entry form filled in!



▲ Left, Philip Stain and right, Ian McLachlan within one of the grazing areas at the Notts Golf Club



▲ Hebridean Sheep at the Notts Golf Club