



# Don't Worry

Lee Penrose looks at those rare and protected species which can make your golf course such a special place to be

On hearing their course is to be visited by one of the STRI ecologists, Bob Taylor or myself, there are always one or two members within each golf club who raise the concern; "What if he finds something rare on the course?"

This inevitably leads to visions of a throng of crusty, sandal clad ecologists arriving at the club in a Citroen 2CV (or worse still – bicycles!) in order to erect fences around colonies of beetles, mushrooms or other equally unrecognisable wildlife.



Understandably, these members are often fearful that the power of management will be taken away from the club and put into the hands of environmentalists whom care little for the future of the golf course and are merely interested in the preservation of the species in question.

In practice this could not be further from the truth. The STRI do often encounter rare, endangered and protected wildlife on golf courses and it is immediately recognisable that their presence is because of, not despite of, the golf course and its past management.

Indeed, according to their policy on golf courses, English Nature; "recognises that the wildlife present on the site is a result of the past and existing management of the land as a golf course; the presumption will be continuance of existing management practices which do not reduce that special interest".

## WHAT ARE RARE AND PROTECTED SPECIES?

Interesting wildlife can be found on every single golf course in the UK. Whether it be a pair of blue tits nesting in the greenkeepers' sheds, a family of foxes utilising the wide open spaces for playing and hunting or a flock of goldfinch pillaging the seed from stands of thistle and dock.

However some species are less common than others or have experienced significant population declines and are vulnerable enough to

be included within the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended).

A mention within one of the various sections within this Act affords a particular species, and their immediate habitat, protection from intentional or deliberate damage. Furthermore, Section 74 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CRoW), lists 391 species of principal importance for which Species Action Plans have been produced by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (available from [www.ukbap.org.uk](http://www.ukbap.org.uk)) this list is constantly under review with species being added and removed as necessary.

For the sake of other articles in this month's magazine a full list of these species is not included here, however some species that do support statutory protection and are commonly found on golf courses include; great crested newt, badger, all 16 species of bat, water vole, red squirrel, brown hare, adder, grass snake, skylark, kestrel, song thrush, grey partridge, linnet, bluebell and juniper.

## WHAT ARE YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES AS LAND OWNERS/MANAGERS?

If any of the above species (or one of the numerous others on the aforementioned CRoW Act) do reside on, or regularly use, your golf course then you do have a responsibility to protect that species and its habitat from damage or destruction. You do not have a responsibility to notify any organisations of the presence of such species; however it will be beneficial to do so as government funding is often available for the further enhancement of the environment.

If management work is to be carried out that may affect a protected species then the correct channels must be followed in order to ensure the golf club fulfil their legal requirements as concerns the particular species.

Pond management, tree felling, building work and course architectural changes are all procedures which may affect the habitats, or access to, of species such as newts, bats or badgers. It is therefore always advisable to conduct thorough surveys of the areas in question before undertaking any work. Relatively cheap (or even free) surveys can often be sourced from local wildlife groups or even expert members within the club.

If it transpires that planned management work will affect individuals or habitats of protected species then a special licence must be acquired from English Nature (or the relevant statutory body in your part of the UK) and a licensed handler must be 'on-call' throughout the procedure. Do not be tempted to bypass any of the above advice in order to save time and cost as the penalties for non compliance are severe and well administered.

## WHAT BENEFITS ARE THERE TO PROTECTING RARE SPECIES?

Aside from the obvious benefits of the membership being able to boast



to other clubs and visiting golfers that their course supports a rare orchid, mammal or newt and the satisfaction you will gain from monitoring its success, there are also financial benefits to harbouring protected wildlife.

Obviously the golf club cannot directly 'profit' from their presence, but management work funded via external bodies will inevitably benefit both the ecology and aesthetics of the course and therefore all parties benefit! Financial assistance with protected species management is available under the following schemes:

**Biodiversity Grants Scheme:** The scheme aims to restore priority species and habitats, to encourage all sections of the community to get involved in conserving biodiversity, and to deliver national conservation through local action. Application packs can be obtained from English Nature's enquiry service team on 01733 455101

**The Wildlife Enhancement Scheme (WES),** funding is available to golf clubs located on Sites of Scientific Interest (SSSI) through English Nature. Management agreements will be arranged that will best suit the species in question and the golf club. Application packs can be obtained from English Nature's enquiry service team on 01733 455101.

The Countryside Council for Wales, Scottish National Heritage and the Northern Ireland Environment Service run similar schemes to English Nature in their respective countries.

**The Environment Agency** may fund local survey and habitat management projects for specific protected species. Contact the Environment Agency Headquarters at Rio House, Waterside Drive, Aztec West, Almondsbury, Bristol, BS12 4UD,

**Main grants programme.** Not-for-profit organisations can apply for grants to fund projects which benefit the heritage of Great Britain, including urban green spaces and habitats. Contact Heritage Lottery Fund 7 Holbein Place, London, SW1W 8NR, 020 7591 6045

**World Wildlife Fund.** Projects involving wetland species and habitats of special concern are eligible for funding. Contact WWF, Panda House, Weyside Park, Godalming, GU7 1XR,

**The Chestnut Fund,** an independent charity, makes grants available to encourage and enable community groups to carry out conservation activities. The grant is administered by British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV). The maximum grant is £300. Contact the BTCV Community Unit on 01302 572236

There are several established organisations throughout the UK that deal with specific collections or species. Groups such as the British Dragonfly Society, the Bat Conservation Trust, RSPB, The Mammal Society etc.. may not only aid with financial assistance but are also an invaluable source of information and technical advice. The majority of these organisations can be found on the internet or via contacting English Nature.

#### WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Involvement with professional ecological consultants such as the STRI and statutory conservation organisations such as English Nature would represent a sound way forward.

Specialist advice is available on all aspects of wildlife management and legislation including general methodologies such as managing grasslands

in order to maintain small mammal populations at a level that will support the protected kestrel.

Ponds within courses that support colonies of great crested newt or natterjack toad or rough grasslands that are filled with breeding skylark or lapwing will necessitate more specific advice and a tailored management programme will be required to maintain and enhance the habitat, equally there is legislation specific to each species outlining management methodology and timing that must be adhered to.

It is always advisable to find out more about the species in question. A good port of call is the UK Biodiversity Action Plans ([www.ukbap.org.uk](http://www.ukbap.org.uk)) which outlines the current legislation and objectives for each species.

In addition, English Nature produce several excellent information booklets regarding best practice management and the legalities relating to the majority of British wildlife species that are available from English Nature's enquiry service team on 01733 455101.

The STRI ecology department deal with these issues on a daily basis and will be happy to assist you with any concerns you may have.



### WHO ARE THE STATUTORY BODIES AND WILL THEY GET INVOLVED?

For the sake of simplicity the Statutory Organisations for England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland will be considered together as they all work in a similar fashion and are 'partner' organisations.

They are the Government funded bodies whose purpose is to promote the conservation of Britain's wildlife and natural features, and in essence are the groups whom are responsible for ensuring the survival of rare flora and fauna assemblages and have legal powers to enforce protection.

However, do not be alarmed by the use of words such as 'enforce' and 'legal powers', as the groups are very responsive to the requirements of a golf club and, usually working closely with the STRI, will work out species protection programmes with golf clubs that support interesting wildlife whilst ensuring the maintenance and enhancement of the course.

The Chief Scientist of English Nature, Dr Keith Duff, is himself a keen golfer and understands all too well the problems caused by inappropriate course management.

In general the statutory bodies will not become involved with a golf club unless they have reason to believe a protected species is being damaged or destroyed, or if they are called for assistance from, or on behalf of, the golf club.

### IN SUMMARY

Do not be perturbed by what may at first appear to be more hassle than benefit when discovering a rare or protected wildlife species on your golf course – the bearded tree huggers will hopefully leave you alone to manage at your discretion!

Certainly seek out advice from professional ecologists or local wildlife groups and do bear in mind the legalities that go with such species. Most of all enjoy the prestige and challenges associated with ensuring survival of our natural history and be sure to boast to other clubs about how valuable your course is to British wildlife.

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