



COMPETING FOR THE GREENER GOOD...

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It sounds ironic, but there is a need in today's environmentally aware climate to "green" the golf club. For some golf clubs this has been a widely accepted fact for a number of years and it is the desire to give recognition to these clubs, coupled with a need to further promote this issue to others, that led to the inception of the BIGGA Golf Environment Competition back in the mid 90's.

Since then the Competition has gone from strength to strength, highlighting the increasing acknowledgement within the Industry of environmental and ecological issues and their relevance to golf.

This year has brought with it a greater number of Competition entries and an even more diverse range of initiatives. This year's overall winner, Caldly Golf Club, has stood out this year for its diverse approach to efficient, practical and sustainable golf course management.

Upon visiting Caldly there was a clear sense of unity among everyone involved, regarding the direction the club was heading and the message they wished to be sending out to the wider community. Golf Clubs, whether we like it or not, are businesses and as such they are under increasing pressure to "become more efficient", "reduce their carbon footprint" and "be kinder to the environment". These are commonly heard phrases, but they are just words, and it is action that counts. This is

perhaps where Caldly has the edge over so many other clubs. Their unity towards developing an efficient club with a low carbon footprint that is, indeed, kinder to the environment is resulting in rapid action being taken.

It seems obvious to state that a business where all contributors share a common goal will inevitably stand a greater chance of achieving its aim but this is often an inhibiting factor at many golf clubs.

Caldly provides a superb test of golf. The club has achieved the balance between playability and wildlife/aesthetic interest that gives a club the edge in what is an increasingly competitive market.





Royal St. David's GC

The Winners...

Overall Winner – Caldy GC
Regional Winners:
Scottish – Loch Lomond GC
Northern – Fairhaven GC
Midlands – Enville GC

Wales & South West
– Royal St. David's GC
South East – Beaconsfield GC
Best New Entry in 2008
– Silloth on Solway GC
Special Initiative Prize
– Bearwood Lakes GC

Course Manager, Carl Crocher, and his team have a commendable dedication to their course and are clearly proud of the work they have achieved. The course supports a wide variety of habitats, from expanses of grassland, to gorse, water features and pockets of woodland, and all are managed in a manner that is appropriate to both golf and nature. A prime example is the grassland management at the club. Carl and his team have undertaken their own grassland management trials, investigating different combinations and frequencies of cutting and scarifying techniques, depending on the proximity of the grassland to play. The result is fine leaved, open grassland swards close to the playing line, working back to less frequently managed deeper swards further offline. This "compromise" between golf and nature allows the speed of golfing play to be maintained while the wildlife benefits of grasslands (wildflower development, potential for ground nesting birds, and connectivity through the site) are maintained.

Elsewhere on the course, gorse, water features and trees are all used to great effect as strategic elements while, as with the grasslands, being maintained in a healthy state for wildlife. Bird and owl boxes have been placed around the course and the team have even constructed a badger sett to provide further habitat for these creatures which are known to frequent the area.

Back at the maintenance facility the club continues to impress. A reedbed filtration system has been installed to deal with all waste washdown water (a vital consideration given increasingly stringent legislation in this area) with all water exiting the reedbed being stored and re-used. To bolster supplies for this closed loop water recycling

system, the club now harvests rainwater directly from its maintenance facility roofs – a relatively low cost and easy to implement initiative, but one that is often overlooked.

Also at the maintenance facility, staff have developed gorse and heather nurseries for later establishment out on the course and have also taken on a new skill, managing bee hives, much to the interest of many members.

I left the maintenance facility thoroughly impressed and headed up to the Clubhouse to meet the Club Secretary. Here I learnt of the Club's bid to become more energy efficient. Low energy light bulbs and motion sensors have been fitted and the Club have furthered the initiative and commissioned an energy audit for the Club. This has resulted in the production of an invaluable document highlighting all sources of energy use and wastage and prescribing methods for reducing them. Many of the suggestions will result in the Club saving considerable amounts on their energy bills. The Club are even looking into the potential of developing sustainable energy sources on site such as solar panels and wind turbines. Ultimately, the club could essentially be self sustaining!

Across the UK there have been many other exceptional entrants and deserving prize winners in the Competition. The Scottish Regional Winners, Loch Lomond Golf Club, could be forgiven for resting on its laurels given the already stunning setting within which the golf club sits. This is simply not the case however and the whole team here maintain a golf course that is true to its natural surroundings and maximises its diverse and attractive setting. On visiting the Club, David Cole, the Golf Course Superintendent, and his team, displayed a clear sense of custodianship over



the land and this is reflected in the management techniques implemented. Part of the course is a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) purely for its rare and diverse lichens and the Club have embraced this and are actively promoting the presence of these rare species.

Additionally, the club has developed sophisticated monitoring techniques for all water, fertiliser and pesticide inputs to the land, and as such can deliver the minimum amounts required to keep the turf suitable for play. The local council do not currently have a recycling collection in place but this has not deterred the Club, who have come together with local businesses to develop their own recycling centre. The approach to environmental matters is very much pro-active, rather than re-active and this puts Loch Lomond in a very strong environmental position.

This year's Northern Regional Winner, Fairhaven Golf Club, stood out for the vast number of projects that are in place for promoting wildlife. The projects range greatly in their scale and it is the attention



Bearwood Lakes Golf Club – Special Initiative Prize

to detail that has impressed the most. The course itself is extremely attractive and offers a thought provoking round largely thanks to the way in which the diverse range of habitats are managed. The course is difficult to define as it incorporates links, heathland and parkland elements. This makes for an extremely diverse site and the Club maximises this diversity potential to the full. Extensive rough grasslands are afforded relaxed management, thereby allowing the influx of wildflower species; pockets of gorse and heather provide further diversity and connectivity across the site and within trees, areas of woodland and other, out of play, areas many of the Clubs smaller scale projects reside. These include large numbers of bird boxes, an owl box and even man-made habitat for harvest mouse. Greenkeeper, James Hutchinson, is in charge of ecological projects at the Club and his enthusiasm for maintaining such high environmental standards at Fairhaven Golf Club has clearly spread to all those involved at the Club including, crucially, the membership, many of

whom have had their golfing experience enhanced by the promotion of wildlife on the course.

The Midlands Regional Prize has been awarded to Enville Golf Club. Course Manager, Jonathan Wood, and his team maintain two courses that allow fairways to pass discreetly through often vast areas of wildlife rich habitat. The most striking feature here is without doubt the extensive heather areas. Impressively, the Club has its own heather trial area where a wide range of management techniques are tested to determine the most appropriate for the course. This has enabled the Club to successfully extend heather areas considerably, both for the benefit of wildlife, and the golfer. The Club are currently working with Natural England on a project to manage some of the more dense woodland blocks on the courses with a view to further promoting heather. The long term vision of the team is impressive.

Enville is also committed to improving water quality. Not only do the Club have a fully compliant water recycling system in place to deal with

contaminated washdown water, but they have also undertaken a project to clean up water entering the feature pond on the course. The ditch feeding the pond has been re-contoured to incorporate swales and reeds in order to slow water flow and allow the reeds to filter sediment and nutrients from the water. The result is the conversion of a pond formally dominated by algae, to a clear, open water body now harbouring a wide variety of wildlife.

Royal St. David's Golf Club is the recipient of the Wales and South West Regional Prize. A consistent strong performer in the Competition, Royal St. David's provides a memorable round of golf. The undulating links environment, coupled with superbly defined fairways and a keen sea breeze, makes the course a first class challenge. Course Manager, Roger Kerry, has considerable experience of managing the environment on the Harlech coast and the whole team have not only maintained, but enhanced the wildlife value of the area. Deep rough grasslands, present for many



Silloth on Solway Golf Club – Best New Entry in 2008

years on the course, have now been extended further and management has now been relaxed to further promote their value. Large scale gorse management has been undertaken in recent years and heather is becoming an important component of the site. The maintenance area has been recently updated with a new water treatment system and storage building and the Clubhouse has recently installed an energy efficient boiler and has extensive plans to further reduce their carbon footprint.

The South East Regional Prize has gone to Beaconsfield Golf Club. Beaconsfield has been a long-standing entrant to the Competition and has therefore had a keen interest in maintaining an environmentally sound golf club for a number of years. Five years after initially commissioning the production of an Ecological Management Plan for the course, Course Manager, Bill Paterson and his team, have made significant alterations to the ecological and playing characteristics of the golf course. There has been an extensive removal and replacement programme of non-native tree species with more appropriate broad-leaved species and the extent of rough grassland on the course has been increased considerably, extending further out and into the playing line thanks to a management regime that has created an open sward dominated by fine leaved grasslands, ideal for golfing play. Within the extensive woodlands, clearings have been created to assist woodland regeneration and create havens for butterflies and other insects.

Also within these clearings basking provisions have been made for the many reptiles known to frequent the course.

The Competition this year has attracted a considerable number of new entrants, an encouraging sign that the message we are trying to portray is being spread. The award for Best New Entry in 2008 goes to Silloth on Solway Golf Club. Silloth is a hidden gem of a club, tucked away in the north western tip of England. This links course had, over the years become dominated by vast stands of gorse and the greenstaff faced a daunting task attempting to bring these areas back into a more manageable state. A few years down the line however the team, led by Course Manager, Brian Storey, has carried out significant work throughout much of these areas, coppicing or removing gorse in order to reduce its cover and bring the desired amount back into a favourable condition both for wildlife and for its aesthetic appeal. The course is now much more open and true to its roots and, as the project continues, it will undoubtedly get better and better. Additionally, the course supports fine leaved grasslands in addition to typical mobile sand dune vegetation. Well managed wetlands can be found in dune slack areas and the course as a whole supports an immense diversity of wildlife.

The final award, the Special Initiative Prize, goes to Bearwood Lakes Golf Club, near Wokingham, Berkshire. Bearwood Lakes is a relatively young course, constructed in the 1990's but has an air of maturity well beyond its years. Course Manager,

Daniel Lightfoot, and his team have brought about significant ecological advances at the Club in the last three years or so and the enthusiasm shown by all at the Club is commendable. The Special Initiative Prize has been awarded for the restoration of a water feature. Previously, the water in the smaller of two lakes contained elevated nutrient levels and massive algal blooms were recurrent each summer. The main source of nutrients in the lake was from the overhanging trees. The greenstaff took action to remove the trees to prevent further nutrient enrichment and also to improve light and air movement at the lake surface which has resulted in the lake becoming an attractive addition to the course, providing valuable habitat for dragonflies and damselflies. Additionally the golf course draw their irrigation water from the main lake on the site and this is constantly monitored so that the water level does not fall below a level agreed with the Environment Agency and washdown water from the maintenance area is treated and returned to the main lake to help sustain water levels.

It has been another good year for the environment and, despite the weather over the last 12 months (which could be described as "Interesting" to say the least!) and the current economic problems, it does seem that the majority of Clubs that are attempting to stand out from the crowd by embracing good environmental and ecological management techniques seem to be holding their own. Coincidence?? I'll let you draw your own conclusions...