

2009 Golf Course Environment Awards

The Golf Course Environment Awards have had a successful first year. Despite being a difficult period for many clubs, the response to the Awards Programme has shown that enthusiasm for the environmental side of golf course management has continued to grow.

The standard of application has been high, and while this has not come as a shock to the judges (STRI are aware that there is a vast amount of exceptional environmental management work going on throughout the Industry), it has made judging the Awards a challenge to say the least. In the end, however, we agreed that the following 10 clubs had stood out in this year's Programme:

Overall Achievement Award – St. Andrews Links Trust

Conservation Greenkeeper of the Year – Matt Worster – Minchinhampton Golf Club

Regional Winner (Scotland) – Carnoustie Golf Links Management Committee

Regional Winner (Northern England) – Fairhaven Golf Club

Regional Winner (Southern England) – Burhill Golf Club

Regional Winner (Wales) – Aberdovey Golf Club

Conservation & Biodiversity Management Award – The Bedfordshire Golf Club

Integrated Turf Management Award – Lymm Golf Club

Waste Management Award – Loch Lomond Golf Club

Water Management Award – Penlanlas Golf Club

Case Study – St. Andrews Links Trust

The Overall Winner of this year's programme is St. Andrews Links Trust who are awarded a study trip to the United States, to visit several high profile clubs during excursions aimed at further enhancing knowledge and understanding of greenkeeping issues.

The diversity and scale of works undertaken at St. Andrews in recent times is truly impressive. Large scale gorse clearance has been carried out across the coastal dune system and a diverse and ecologically

rich grassland sward has been restored in its place. By opening up the dune landscape the team at St. Andrews has managed to revert much of the course landscape back to its original form.

In addition to this work, the club has actively encouraged nesting sand martin within an on-site quarry via the creation of clean sand faces, assisting in an increase in populations here in recent years. Skylark are also being encouraged via an ongoing grassland management programme in key areas.

A further high profile project undertaken in 2009 has been the construction of a comprehensive reedbed system to cleanse waste washdown water. This environmentally friendly method of complying with waste water legislation has been constructed 'in-house' to an extremely high standard and will, once fully established, no doubt become a feature of the course.

The amount of environmentally directed projects, coupled with a general enthusiasm and clear desire to be considerate to the surrounding environment, has made St. Andrews a worthy winner of the overall prize in what has genuinely been a closely fought contest.

Case Study - Conservation Greenkeeper of the Year – Matt Worster, Minchinhampton Golf Club

As with the Overall Winner, The Conservation Greenkeeper Award brings with it the highly desirable prize of a trip to the United States.

This year's winner of the Award is Matt Worster, from Minchinhampton Golf Club. Matt undertakes all standard greenkeeping duties in addition to developing and initiating ecological projects at the club which are both numerous and extensive. As a result, the club awarded Matt the title of Ecology Coordinator in recognition of his enthusiasm and drive towards improving wildlife interests on the course.

Matt's career at Minchinhampton began in 2002 as Assistant Greenkeeper.



Matt Worster of Minchinhampton

Since that time, he has completed a BSc (Hons) in Rural Environmental Sciences, producing a final year dissertation on the impact of golf course practices on Minchinhampton's Old Course.

On the course, Matt's influence has impacted greatly on the ecological management work undertaken. Large scale grassland management work has been carried out including the trialling of highly successful hay strewing experiments to increase grassland wildflower content. Hedgerow planting and maintenance work has been extensive and pond management, creation and restoration work has been undertaken to an extremely high standard.

Reflecting on the balance between golf and wildlife, Matt concludes, "Golf courses provide stable habitats and multiple opportunities for habitat creation and protection. Sound ecological management of these features and the wider golf course encourages flora and fauna to thrive, creating sanctuaries for wildlife and increasing the quality of the golf course for the players and public to enjoy".

Thank you

In addition to the two top accolades, four 'Best in Region' Awards have been presented, with each recipient receiving a free ecological advisory visit from an STRI consultant; and four further clubs have been recognised for a 'special initiative', each receiving free

admission for two delegates to STRI's Ecology Training Courses held in October.

All prize winners have undertaken a wide array of worthy ecological and environmental projects and while it is impossible to cover them all in this article, case studies of the winning clubs can be found on the Awards website at www.golfenvironmentawards.com – here, you will also find details on how your club can get involved in the 2010 Programme.

The Golf Course Environment Awards have shown that there is a considerable amount of positive environmental work going on in the golf industry and it is important to recognise that while this work is improving conditions for wildlife and reducing the impact of the golf club on the environment, it is also improving the golf club as a product.

Management work on the golf course is undertaken to maximise its playability by producing a course that is aesthetically pleasing and strategically interesting – two key elements to the enjoyment of the game. STRI and the Awards sponsors would like to thank all clubs involved in the 2009 Programme and look forward to what we hope to be successful 2010 for all concerned within the Industry.

Richard Stuttard, STRI Ecology and Environment