



# High hopes

Jim Cook takes a trip to Wiltshire, to meet the team at High Post GC, a club with ambition as high as the level of beauty it entails

**Last year, Paul Hope, a greenkeeper at High Post Golf Club, won BIGGA's 2011 photographic competition with a stunning shot of a deer prancing over the course at first light.**

After a visit to the club, one of the striking features was how much of an oasis, or even haven, this picturesque Wiltshire course offers for many other types of rare and elusive wildlife as well as deer.

It was a warm day in mid-May when I met with Course Manager, Lachlan Morrison and the team at High Post. Lachlan was keen to speak about the importance of ecology to this club and said:

"We're in the process of sympathetically clearing scrub areas and regenerating our gorse areas. We've re-planted gorse in new areas and it's looking quite impressive, with new plants sprouting through where we cleared. We've also exposed a pine

tree next to the 6th tee which was previously covered and some holly trees."

Paul Hope said: "The wildlife is abundant out there as well. Of the birds, we've had red kites over the course for the first time in several years and sparrowhawks, kestrels



Winning shot for BIGGA's 2011 photographic competition



and short-eared and tawny owls have been seen. Two years ago kestrels raised two young from a box on 18. That's one of the things I love about the job because we manage that bit of land out there and still co-exist with the fauna."

The club's logo shows a hare running beneath a tree and every day these animals are seen on the course along with others such as foxes, owls and all manner of birds of prey.

Lachlan said reasons why the 110 acre downland course sees so much wildlife are because of ecology work, environmental grasses and also that it is surrounded by arable farming land.

It is interesting to note that greenkeeping runs in the family for Lachlan, who is originally from Renfrew, Scotland, and he is part of four generations taking up the profession, with his grandfather, father, two brothers, three uncles and their sons all working at various courses.

He spoke about his chemical usage: "We don't use a lot of fertiliser and try to be as green as we can by keeping spraying of fungicides to an absolute minimum.

"We were fungicide-free up until the winter before last when an attack of snow mould meant we had to use them. Since then we've changed our policy and sometimes use fungicides as a preventative.

"We use lot of seaweed products

## Jim Cook had a chat with Paul Hope about his photography

### What is the story behind your picture of the deer on the course?

"Through the summer I often come in at first light with my camera. I love photography, always have done, and I was out at silly o'clock chasing the sunlight, catching the sunrise off to the side of the second green. I rattled a load of shots off and was stood off to one side leaning against the pine tree smoking a cigarette. The deer wandered out from the trees on my left and stood right in front of me. I got some shots of it walking across the green, one of which was the one I won the competition with and then it came and stood about 15ft in front of me, posed for a minute, then off it went. Usually they run as soon as they see you and I'd been after a picture for ages. Last year there were three of them; a mother and two little ones."

### What other wildlife have you enjoyed taking photographs of?

"I'd not seen a short eared owl on the course before and it was brilliant to get a picture of one of them. All kinds of birds of prey and the red kite is probably my favourite. I love seeing the wildlife here. I'm out with my camera for hours trying to get good shots of them. I haven't seen a snake yet though and would love to get a shot of one of them."

### Do you do much photography away from the course?

"Yes lots. I do portraits, weddings and studio work and I would like to set up my own business."

### Where did you learn the skill?

"I'm self taught. I've always been into it and most of the cameras I've owned up until about five years ago were point and shoot ones. I always thought photography was too difficult to learn, but the basics are so simple. From there it's just practice."

### What other photographic awards have you won?

"I was runner up in a Salisbury Journal competition last year, won the last two competitions in the Stonehenge Trader and won a Visit Wiltshire one."

*Last year Paul used some of his pictures taken out on the course to create a calendar, for sale in the clubhouse, with proceeds going to charity. This year he was planning to do the same again.*





and are finding Sustane organic fertiliser gives a great response.”

Sometimes the simplest solutions to problems are most effective and this was certainly the case when Lachlan and his team were faced with chafer grubs a few years ago. Initially, badly affected areas were re-turfed, but finding this to be costly, time-consuming and short-lived, they tried using pheromone traps with great success.

Lachlan said: “We spent a fortune on turf but then tried the pheromone traps, which look like Chinese lanterns and they are just wonderful. You hang them about 2ft off the ground and it attracts then contains the adult chafer beetles. The first year we put them in we had to empty them weekly because we were catching so many.

Last year they weren't quite so successful, maybe because it was windy at the time and we caught a lot less, but each year when we've used the traps we've had much less damage the following year. It's a cost effective way of dealing with the problem.”

Of the 71 bunkers on the course, the par-five 2nd boasts 17 of them! The five-strong team hand rake them every day to keep them in good shape.

A quirky feature of High Post is the vast number of grass-filled hollows throughout the course next to greens and on fairways. From afar they do appear like bunkers, but closer inspection reveals them to contain no sand.

Some have been formed where earth has been taken to build a green, but for others, no-one quite knows what they are. Lachlan's theory that they are there to improve aesthetics and break up otherwise flat terrain is the most likely.

The hollows may look good, but in growing season especially, they can be a pain to maintain. Lachlan said: “A lot of our maintenance time is taken up with strimming these hollows but they are worth it as they add a lot.”

The course is on chalk and therefore drainage is never an issue. Previous to my visit it had seen almost constant rain for about six weeks but it appeared as none had fallen at all. This time last year the club had used about 1,500 cubic metres of water, a third of its allocation, this year the irrigation system had not even been turned on.

During summer the course is usually extremely dry and Lachlan said: “It burns to a crisp, but



because it's bent and fescue on the fairways it goes brown and then a bit of rain and it's back to life again. It does cause me to worry because green, stripy fairways are ideal, but regular communication with members helps to explain the issue."

There are 600 members at High Post Golf Club.

The club's greens have an organic content of around 6% and are mostly fescue, with some Highland bent and a little of the inevitable meadow grass.

Lachlan spoke about the sun being a cultural method of ridding greens of meadow grass, though warned: "Since fescue is more drought resistant, two months into the summer most of the meadow grass is gone. We've got to be careful though and get the balance right, because we could end up with patchy areas on the greens if the meadow grass is completely killed off."

A number of projects, large and small, have been undertaken over the past few years.

In 2008, the facilities for the greenkeepers were improved immensely. Where there used to be a single room, there is now a self-contained building with drying and washing facilities, a canteen and office.

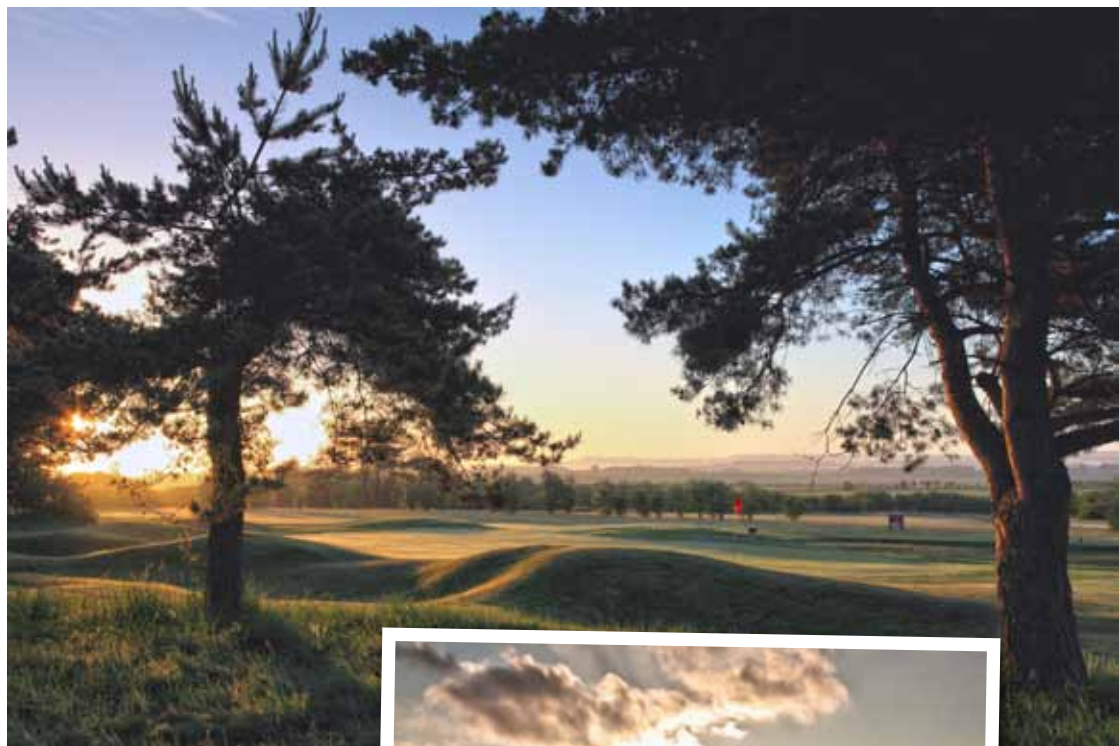
Other recent projects have been the building of two aggregate bays, one for sand and one for top-dressing, completed by a contractor last winter and also the building of sleeper-lined paths on parts of the course which was done in-house.

At 6,305 yards High Post Golf Club's course is not the longest, but challenging it certainly is.

Tournaments including the McGregor Cup, the Carris Trophy, South West Amateur and English Boys Open have been played here and the weekend after my visit two tournaments including the Wiltshire County Championships were due to be hosted by the club.

Peter Alliss, who once held the course record, has rated High Post's 9th hole in his choice of the best 18 holes in Great Britain. This deceptively tricky hole dog-legs to the right and unless a drive is placed to the left of the fairway, a hazardous blind approach awaits.

Just before I left the club, Lachlan and I stood by the 18th green watching a variety of military aircraft buzzing about the nearby MoD Boscombe Down aircraft testing base. Planes often pass low and directly over the 3rd green and a few years ago a Harrier even crashed near the course after the pilot ejected.



Our attention was soon turned to a bird hovering in thermals above the course; a kestrel preying for food. Then another at a higher altitude, which appeared to be a buzzard and then darting swallows that make the same journey from Africa every spring.

This swarm of activity brought it home how vibrant a place High Post Golf Club is.

2022 will be the club's centenary year and in preparation they were looking at bringing in architects to assess what improvements could potentially be made out on the course. Clearly the future holds a lot in store for this busy and unique golf club.



### HPGC Equipment Inventory

- 2 Toro 3250 greens mowers
- John Deere 2500 greens mower
- 2 Toro 3100-D sidewinders
- Toro 5510 fairway mower
- John Deere 3245C rough mower
- Hardy tractor
- 2 John Deere Pro Gators
- 4 John Deere 220A hand mowers
- John Deere 4610
- John Deere 1070 with front loader
- John Deere 166 lawn mower

