

Beesy does it

Bob Taylor, Head of Ecology and Environment at STRI, updates us on Operation Pollinator and visits two courses where BIGGA members are making a real difference

Operation Pollinator is designed to reverse the plight of bumblebees and pollinating insects in the UK and Ireland by creating valuable new habitats in out of play areas of golf courses.

Its aim is to establish pollen and nectar rich habitats on up to 500 golf courses to provide the essential food sources and nesting sites for pollinating insects - including bumblebees and other important wild bees.

Operation Pollinator provides a framework of knowledge, expertise and experience to assist with the successful management of wildflower habitats in out-of-play rough, alongside the conventional management of the golf course.

The inaugural Operation Pollinator Award, run by The Sports Turf Research Institute (STRI) and Syngenta, was held during BTME. After long deliberations North Foreland Golf Club in Kent were awarded the top prize.

The Award aims to highlight the plight of our native pollinators which are undergoing massive declines due to loss of the countryside and changing weather patterns. Moreover, just like the Environment Awards, it is hoped the award will be used as an industry platform allowing us to demonstrate that far from being a selfish use of the landscape, golf is a positive contributor to biodiversity and the conservation of both species and habitats, some of which owe their very existence to the presence of the golf course.

Operation Pollinator will give recognition to golf clubs that are committed to the conservation management, and which have successfully created pollen rich habitats on golf courses leading to an increase in pollinating insects.

So what is North Foreland doing that is so special?

The sites chosen at the club, a 36-hole facility on the Kent coast, had been unmanaged for over 30 years allowing deep ground ivy to take over and compromise the former chalk grassland. Site selection was due to it being largely out of play with limited foot traffic.

The results of the grassland management improvement work have seen a major transformation with the rough now alive with flying insects, moths, butterflies and grasshoppers. Bee activity within bee hotels has resulted in a gradual species increase and much enhanced environmental and ecological value. From the work taking place at North Foreland, it is clear that this is a long term project with lots of future potential.

Course Manager Dan McGrath MG fully understands and appreciates what works best in the course environment. The seed selected by him indicates that he has an implicit understanding of what grows well on the course and how it blends in with the rest of the course to provide an enjoyable, colourful and inspiring environment for members and visitors alike.

There are an increasing number of golf clubs working to develop pollinator habitat, building upon their experience and gaining direct and indirect benefit from the conservation management opportunities. Some clubs are also realising business opportunities from the initiative.

The finalists for the award included:

- Carnoustie Golf Links Management Trust
- St Andrews Links
- John O'Gaunt Golf Club
- Dundonald Links
- Hankley Common Golf Club





Bombus rudrearius (also main photograph)



Bombus humilis

- The Grove Golf Club
- Pyecombe Golf Club
- Luffness Golf Club
- South Essex Golf Club
- Bonnyton Golf Club
- Royal Tarlair Golf Club

The range of work is diverse. At one club, this work may involve simply recognising the plight of our pollinators and getting members to tie in with the need to leave areas of grassland, whilst at another bee houses are being erected and considerable effort is being given to creating flower rich grasslands.

So how does a club get started? Simple - call STRI and discuss the range of opportunities that are available. Identify areas of grassland that can be set aside and managed to optimise pollinator interest.

A management programme will be required highlighting management techniques including the sowing of appropriate wild flowers if needed. It will be essential that the flowers present provide a nectar or pollen source throughout three of the seasons.

Ensure good overwintering habitat which is essential if species are to fully utilise the habitats present. Dead wood including log piles, fallen wood scattered on the ground and ariel wood are essential - not only for overwintering - but those specialist invertebrates that live in dead wood which are important in pollinating our flowers and grasses.

John O'Gaunt are well underway with the pollinator conservation work and are so advanced they are using the seed heads collected from the first established areas to develop new areas of grassland around the course.

Do not rely on even neat and attractive areas - tall herbs including umbelifers and species of labiate in out of play areas should be encouraged. This may appear untidy to some but nature is not always tidy; these areas are often vital and will support species that are dependent upon them.

Communication is likely to become a main part of the programme and can take many forms. North Foreland are using beer

about the author



As STRI's Head of Ecology and Environment, Bob Taylor is one of the most experienced ecologists working within golf. Over the last 20 or more years he has developed a number of innovative and bespoke management techniques that are now routinely used in the running of golf courses.

Bob's work takes him all over the UK and Europe. He sees major opportunities for environmental, biodiversity, and conservation improvement, and for golf to take the lead as positive custodian of the landscape.

mats in the bar printed with the Operation Pollinator logo; this is a great way of getting members and visitors aware and involved. Some clubs such as the London Club and Minchinhampton have installed signage alongside grassland areas which in turn have been specially developed next to public rights of way. This is a great way to get ramblers aware of the positive conservation work being implemented on the courses.

I would like to thank all of the golf clubs for entering, I am confident that working together we can all make a positive contribution to the conservation of our countryside and all that is in it.

There are probably many clubs just starting out perhaps feeling that they haven't done enough but as I have found on visiting these clubs that they are doing far more than they think. They would not only prove worthy contenders of this new, prestigious award, but by joining in they become part of a growing network of similar like-minded clubs.



Operation Pollinator Awards

The Operation Pollinator Awards is open to all UK and Ireland clubs implementing the Operation Pollinator programme. Operation Pollinator guidelines and advice has been developed specifically for golf courses in conjunction with STRI and is available through Syngenta. Please do your part by registering your interest with Syngenta caroline.carroll@syngenta.com or with me at STRI bob.taylor@stri.co.uk. We will notify you when the application form for 2014 is available. Award entries are judged by STRI.