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Course Feature

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Scott MacCallum meets Chris Lomas, a young man well prepared to meet the challenge of becoming the fourth head man in the history of The Berkshire Golf Club.

When Chris Lomas took over as Course Manager at The Berkshire Golf Club, in charge of the club's two highly rated courses, last September it was a challenge he was more than ready to meet.

He had spent four years working at Swinley Forest as Deputy Course Manager before making the short journey to The Berkshire where he initially shadowed Rob Moreton. After about 18 months he began to take more and more responsibility for the running of the courses before finally, on Rob's retirement, he was promoted to the position of Course Manager.



After two hours of chatting with the 29 year old Lancastrian I was more than convinced that the club had been right to identify Chris as their new Course Manager and nurture him accordingly, but it was just before we said our good-byes that I appreciated fully that Chris was a man doing the job for which he was destined.

At the end of the interview I said I'd send him the piece before publication just to ensure I hadn't misinterpreted anything and that he was happy with what had been written. He said to email it to him and proceeded to write down his address.

Now having only been in post a few months you could have forgiven him for not yet having acquired clomas.theberkshire@hotmail.com or coursemanager.theberkshire@hotmail.com as his email address so, as you might expect, his address was neither of these.

Chris' email address is coursemanager@hotmail.com When I complimented him on having got hold of such a definitive address he said he'd had it for sometime and that he had coursemanager@btopenworld.com as well.

If good management is all about planning ahead and seizing the initiative Chris obviously has those qualities in spades.

And he has grabbed his opportunity with both hands keen to place his own stamp on the Herbert Fowler designed Red and Blue courses at The Berkshire,

which both rank within the top 50 of Golf World's rankings, but at the same time full of praise for the way in which Rob Moreton prepared him for the task.

"A lot of people were upset that the position wasn't advertised and I'm not surprised because it's a wonderful job and I'm very lucky to have it," said Chris, as we sat in the bungalow style office and mess room block which sits alongside the main maintenance facility.

When it came to the hand over period which can often be a fraught time for any retiring Course Manager and his keen-to-get-started successor Rob's handling of the situation could provide the blueprint for others.

"He did it very cleverly," said Chris.

"He started to cut me more and more slack, leaving me to make the decisions I find myself making today. From time to time our ideas conflicted a bit but on the whole it was a sound partnership.

"I've never met a man who was so enthused about greenkeeping as Rob. He would live it, breath it and talk all day about it. It was wonderful because I learned so much from that.

"He also acknowledged his mistakes and was very open about them. He'd say 'Look I did that wrong' or 'I didn't get that drainage right'. That was what I liked about the man."

So what will the Lomas approach be to managing what is one of the finest



The Berkshire Team with Fudge the dog



Chris classifies The Berkshire as a woodland course with heather

pieces of golfing land to be found anywhere?

Well, one of the first things that he did was to split his team of 14 into two teams, one for the Red Course, under Head Greenkeeper Mark Hancock and one for the Blue, under John Haines.

"At the moment there is a team of six on each course with myself as Course Manager and our Horticultural Engineer - he hates to be known as a mechanic! We have 576 acres of land, which is a fair old lump and the guys used to go out in the morning and have little focus on where their job was going to be. By splitting them into two teams I'd like to think everyone was a little bit more focussed. It's been difficult through the winter as all we seem to have been doing is digging holes and repairing drains and cutting and burning trees, but in the summer we should get a bit of friendly rivalry and competition going. People commenting on the greens on the other course and that sort of thing," said Chris, who is hoping to add another man to each team to bring them up to seven.

The Berkshire never has winter tees or greens and Chris has inherited a non course closure policy which he loves.

"It takes the pressure off me as I don't have to come in in the morning and say sorry guys we're closed today."

On the management of the courses themselves, Chris sees woodland management as a big issue and has been talking with John Nicholson about improving their practices.

Interestingly Chris doesn't class The Berkshire as a heathland course any more.

"I think 75 years ago you could say it was heathland, when there were no trees but I'd class the likes of The Berkshire and Sunningdale as woodland courses with heather. I'd actually say that genuine heathland courses are very few and far between. Hankley Common and Walton Heath are two of them but they have both done a great deal of work in clearing out trees. Some courses are meant to be heathland and others are meant to adapt between the two.

"If we were to clear trees here I think it would spoil the nature of the golf course. Each hole is an entity in its own right and some members like to see thick woodland on the course. We are trying to retain that but thin the trees

out so that if you look carefully you will be able to see another fairway. We are trying to get more light and wildlife into the areas, give the trees a chance and get some secondary growth coming through. Most of the trees out there are the same age as the golf courses 75 years, so they have all grown to the one height and will die and fall down around the same time so we need some secondary growth."

They are working on an on-going programme of tree thinning using AJ Forestry to remove trees for them.

"Where we have a green surrounded by trees with the sun struggling to get through we are taking out a wedge of trees - the wider portion near the green working back to a point - which will let the light in and retain the look of the hole from the fairway.

"Woodland management plays second fiddle to turf management but it is hellish important on these golf courses. If you don't keep it up it soon gets away from you."

Chris drew my attention to an aerial photograph of the course on his office wall.

"If you look you can see that where the trees are creating shade there is no heather but where there is sunlight the heather is better developed."

Knowing how important heather is as a resource, a number of Course Managers at some of the more heather rich clubs are planning to form a Heather Committee to discuss the best ways of managing and protecting it.

"David Murdoch MG, of Liphook; Brian Turner, of Sunningdale; Clive Osgood, at Walton Heath; and Gareth Roberts, of Hankley Common and others will get together and talk as we've all got similar types of golf courses of similar ages."

Heather is a much talked about subject among the Course Managers who are both blessed with it and carry the responsibility of looking after it.

"You hear that Swinley's heather is good one year or that Sunningdale's is fantastic and wonder why?. So we intend to get together and discuss who's cutting at what height, how regularly and the benefits that have come from it. How do you get rid of grass in heather - spraying, digging, burning it out? Everyone is doing so many different things. Clive does a lot of turf lifting at



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Course Feature



Walton Heath and it works well for him but might not work for other people so we will brain storm it. You can never know too much, the minute you think you know it all is the minute it comes up and bites you."

One of The Berkshire's contributions to the discussions is on the topic of heather overhangs in bunkers.

"They look beautiful but are not very playable and some people chop it back severely, but you lose the heather. We have been building the bunker faces out with pit sand so the overhang is not so bad and we don't have to cut the heather back. A few of the other guys found that interesting," said Chris, whose father, Nick, worked with Clive Osgood, as Secretary of Walton Heath for a number of years.

"He loved working with Clive. He could listen to him all day and says that Walton Heath have a wonderful asset in Clive," said Chris.

He was always going to have a career in sport. He was brought up in a home backing onto Pleasington Golf Club, in Lancashire and initially he became an Assistant Pro at the club.

"I got a little disillusioned working in the shop and felt I wasn't going to be good enough to make it as a player but I got to know the greenkeepers at the club and became really interested in agronomy and turf culture, learning a lot from Len Cook, the now retired Head Greenkeeper."

He left the Assistant's post after eight months, finished his A Levels and contemplated doing a Sports Science degree but eventually decided upon the HND at Reaseheath College, which was in its first year.

"I did my sandwich year at Carden Park under Andy Campbell MG and worked for a time for the European Tour, at The Colony Club in Vienna under Gary Moseley."

He freely admits that he, along with his fellow students were the guinea pigs for the three year HND course and feels that many of those who finished the course quickly became disillusioned.

"Many of them had no experience of working on a golf course before starting the course and were expecting to walk into good jobs at the end and I

would think about a third of them are no longer in greenkeeping at all," he said.

When he finished the course he sent his CV to all the clubs he admired in the Home Counties, as he'd played golf in the area and loved the courses and also wanted to live near his brother, who'd also moved south.

He also wanted to further his rugby career which had seen him play for, among others, Orrell along with England international, Dewi Morris, and win around 30 England caps at various levels up to England Under 21. He is also a good friend with England and Lions Centre, Will Greenwood, with whom he grew up, and who also visits The Berkshire for a game while training with England at their base near Bagshot.

Chris initially played for Premiership club, Richmond, as he says, acting as a human tackling bag for Ben Clarke and Scott Quinnell, before playing semi professionally for Esher and latterly Chobham before retiring last year. It doesn't prevent him from accepting the odd invite to play in the Dubai Sevens however.

"I quit because I'm 29 and wanted to wake up at 40 and be able to play golf and not be carrying long-standing injury problems."

Back to greenkeeping...

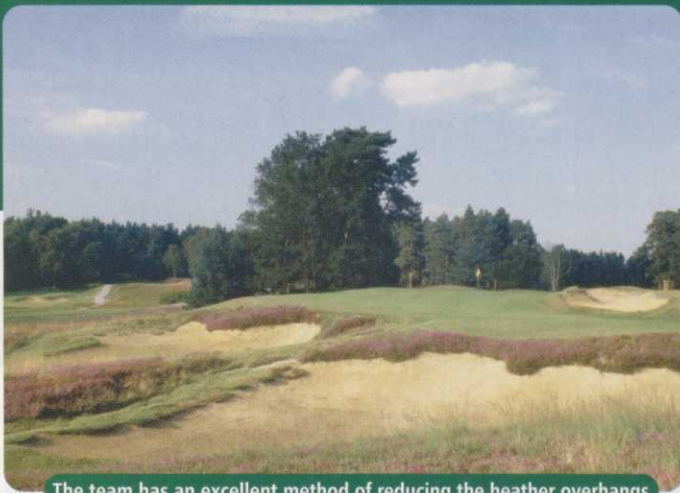
Among the clubs to reply to his CV blitz was Wentworth where he was interviewed by Chris Kennedy and Graham Mathieson and offered a job.

"Quite a surprise really because I wasn't Scottish," he joked.

However, Chris Kennedy advised him that there was an opportunity at Swinley Forest and to get along there. I'd heard of Swinley Forest as my dad had played it years before and you can't do anything but fall in love with it. I owe Chris Kennedy a lot for pointing me in that direction."

Chris worked under Lawson Bingham for three years at Swinley and is grateful to Ian Pearce, Secretary, for taking a gamble in a young upstart still wet behind the ears. Then the opportunity of becoming Deputy at The Berkshire came along.

"I knew Rob was due to retire but there was never any guarantee that I'd



The team has an excellent method of reducing the heather overhangs

get the job."

But get the job he did, becoming only the fourth head man at The Berkshire in its 75 year history. To celebrate its 75th anniversary among other things a shotgun start tournament for 140 between The Berkshire and Sunningdale will be held in the summer complete with marquee and barbecue while the club is hosting the British Ladies' Seniors this year and the British Men's Seniors next year.

"I am indebted for the opportunity I've been given here and I will do everything in my power to justify their confidence in me. The members are a really supportive bunch and I have a very experienced team who rarely let themselves or each other down. I also work closely with the Secretary, Colonel John Hunt, who will fight my corner if needed," said the extremely happy Chris.

Oh, and he's more than happy to communicate by email with anyone who wants to discuss anything within the piece, or greenkeeping matters in general.

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The problems caused by roots finding their way into underground drainage pipes are not often considered or discussed. However, root ingress is a very real problem to drainage systems and therefore in order to ensure that you get the most effective use of your drainage scheme, education in the causes and how to prevent the damage or deal with blockages once they have occurred is necessary.



When a drainage scheme is installed consideration should always be given to ensure that the system is functional, the pipes and backfill are at the right depth and sized correctly. However, how many consider the implications of the planting that provides the landscaping feature?

A good drainage design will consider and accommodate the implications of the present landscape on the drainage system. There is a rule of thumb, which suggests that a drain should never be laid under the canopy of a tree, others will say that a drain should not be installed within 10-metres of a tree. If there is no option but to lay the pipework within the canopy of the tree then it is imperative to lay a section of unperforated pipe. This is not ideal,

as time passes and the tree grows, the roots will spread and there is always the possibility that they will eventually find their way into the pipe and cause serious problems.

Roots of trees and woody plants naturally grow in the upper layers of soil, usually not extending beyond the tree or plant's drip line. However, if the sensitive tips of root shoots, called the 'meristem', detects a good source of nutrition or moisture they will grow one cell at a time towards that source.

Roots enter the pipes as tiny hair-like structures. They grow quickly inside the pipe and can separate or crack pipe joints and eventually block the system. Because both pipes and roots are underground and out of sight Golf clubs are often unaware of root



invasions until serious and costly damage has occurred.

So what can be done? One option is to cut the roots in the pipes or rod the pipes to clear blockages. This is only a temporary measure, as this often encourages faster thicker re-growth. Nigel Law, Contract Supervisor for White Horse Contractors tells the story of a recreation ground in Reading where the company had been asked to review the drainage and establish the problem. A wet spot was identified in the field and small-scale excavations took place, which showed the roots had attached themselves and entered the drainage pipe. The only course of action on this occasion was to cut the pipe and remove a section and pull the roots out, this was quite remarkable as the roots were removed in a single piece measuring 12-meters and 100mm diameter, the size of the internal pipe. On this occasion the pipe was replaced and rejoined.

"Cutting down established trees on Golf Courses in general is not welcomed", says Robert Donald Managing Director of White Horse Contractors, "and landscaping is an important aspect. Trees provide many of our courses with a natural architecture that could not be mimicked in land formations alone. However, we have noticed on so many occasions that the drainage of a recently constructed course suffers as planting schemes are introduced after the contractors have left and take little account of drainage schemes. Some of the worst species are willows and poplars, these

are frequently introduced to provide rapid cover as they are quick growing and tolerant of heavy soils. Unfortunately, these are also water loving plants and the roots have a propensity to seek moisture, the drainage becomes the target"

To manage and maintain root ingress it is possible to install a plastic or synthetic root barrier. Using a chain trencher a trench is cut to a minimum 1.25m depth the barrier is installed between the drainage scheme and the roots, thereby preventing future growth in that particular direction. The trench is backfilled and reinstated and a permanent solution achieved. An alternative to this is to dig a trench only, around the fairway, green, or drainage scheme and then every other year the trench is re-excavated and the roots effectively pruned. This method is widely used in Portugal, where many of the courses are surrounded by dense coniferous woodland.

If you consider that the drainage scheme efficiency is diminishing on your course you would do well to explore the possibility of root ingress as well as the usual capping compaction and general deterioration. Have an inspection, expose some pipe work adjacent to tree planted areas and see if you can get to the root of your drainage problem.

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Fescue, Forgiven and not forgotten



Chris Haspell makes a plea for the return to more traditional values and grasses

After a recent National Turfgrass Foundation Conference that I attended in the UK which revolved around new techniques of turf management with some of the world's best known turf experts talking about *Agrostis palustris* or, as it is known today, *Stolonifera*, and our old friend *poa.annua*, I felt compelled to offer some hope to those in the industry who have heard the word "fescue" and indeed still believe in it as a big part of our green, tee and fairway management today.

As I left the conference I walked away in deep discussion with my colleagues wondering if, indeed, we lived in the same world as most of the speakers.

Cutting heights of 2-2.5 mm were common on the new *Agrostis* types, and speeds of 16 foot not uncommon on the stimpmeter, Architects are making greens with less undulations to accommodate this, and Stanley Zontek, from the USGA, admitted that even the Director from the USGA commented at a recent conference that the USGA were hypocritical in making recommendations that went out of the window as soon as you mentioned tournament!

However, does your Chairman of Green attend the USGA annual conference or just talk about the speed of the greens at the US Open in the bar with his friends?

Grow in of these new types of creeping Bent grasses was relatively easy. You just need to apply 25 kilos of N a week for around seven months and hey presto a fantastic green with a very large Bio Mass (when I was a lad this was called thatch) which shock horror has to be controlled! Hollow tining up to four to six times in summer, plus graden which could be visual on the greens for up to nine months afterwards. Topdressing with fine sand was the only option, for anything else could not be matted in.

Mr Zontek went on to say that the average US golf course will have a pesticide budget in the region of \$50,000. I do not know how many clubs in the UK and Europe have this size of budget but I would estimate around 1-2%. How many of these club members are aware just how much has to be done to control the thatch sorry "Bio Mass"? And how many accept you actually doing it. Staff levels on golf courses using these new Bents were also much higher.

Dr Frank Rossi, from Cornell University, told us how good *poa* could be on greens, we all know how *poa* reacts to *Fusarium*, and *Anthraco*se, The use of growth inhibitors could be used to both control and manage *poa*, so the question was posed if you had no chemicals how would you manage it. The simple answer from Frank was that you do not, it will die!

I have been involved in turf management around 20 years, the last eight in Denmark, and the restrictions we have are coming to the UK. Similar restrictions exist in the Netherland's, Norway, and many other European countries.

Staffing levels in Denmark are very low because of the cost of

labour, with the average course being 18, plus a par 3, plus driving range; you will find three to five staff to maintain all these areas.

With this in mind, coupled with restrictions on chemicals, we need easy-to-manage greens which do not grow vigorously and need only small amounts of nutrients. There is tax on the use of N in any form in Denmark 50 pence per kilo.

Many people have tried new creeping bent greens but with little staff and chance for maintenance the greens quickly develop thatch sorry "Bio Mass" with the swings in temperature and winter play they quickly develop disease for which we have no chemicals and *poa* comes in. Greens which are around five to seven years old are generally 50% *poa* and yet architects still want to use it.

Many people say that fescue cannot become dominant on old *poa* greens, and with the risk of being controversial, "Bull Excrement". The problem is even consultants advise a softly softly approach and in many cases do not want to look for or recommend its use. We have successfully transformed our greens over a seven year period from 100% *Poa* to a dominant bent and fescue sward. But this is not just on one course in Denmark but several golf courses are running these programmes. We have a pay-and-play course just outside Copenhagen which is 54 holes both short and long courses and the main course has in excess of 60,000 rounds a year and still maintains 95% fescue greens after 10 years even with winter play. They have a staff of 12 in summer, all fairways are fescue all greens dominant Fescue with some Bent, so for the cynics who say it just can't stand traffic the theory needs to be redressed. "Bull Excrement" I hear you say.

I think it was Jim Arthur who said "Some of the best greens are on the poorest courses" and recently I heard Walter Woods reply to a comment of water on the fairways at St Andrews, "There are cliffs around St Andrews but I do not have to jump."

I ask myself is traditional greenkeeping a dying art? There are only a few people who really know how to look after Bent/fescue left, and we need to milk all their experience before it's too late. There are far too many who simply write off the thought because they have heard it's impossible. The problem is we have become caught up in the

golfer syndrome, a need for false speed. Many of us think short is good in place of true and honest greens which still putt with pace. Unfortunately many of us use salesmen as our consultants for nutrients and there are some very good angles on sales tactics now.

On my previous course we had around 40-45,000 rounds a year. It's a parkland/woodland course and the greens stimped generally at 9 on a daily basis and this is with cutting at 5mm but with a regular light verti-cutting and topdressing program. The key to success is low fertility primarily light dressings of 8.0.0 throughout the season and around 40-60 kilos of N in a good year. Keeping the surface as dry as possible for as long as possible we try to give the poa cold turkey with a fine balance of watering to maintain a surface but enough to encourage drought stress on the poa and keep it on the back foot. This was obviously difficult at first with high-domination of poa on the greens. Anthracnose disease was actively encouraged but sensible management was required to maintain a reasonable putting surface for the membership while the transformation process from poa to Fescue was taking place.

On top of this we use seaweed around once a month and a little K in the last dressing in September and regular applications of Iron Sulphate during the winter months.

In Great Britain you only need travel to St Andrews and talk with Gordon Moir; or Kingsbarns, where Stuart McColem deserves a medal, and Chris Whittle, at Birkdale, who is reintroducing fescue and doing an excellent job. We need to change the golfers perception of how a green looks and get them to focus more on how it putts.

I am sure there are many more who share the same views, so stand up and be counted, My personal view, if my short experience is anything to go by, is that a spraying ban will also hit the UK as I see it within the next 10-15 years.

Of course, in any project, you need the backing of your club and communication is vital if you want to have the membership on your side. If you explain the facts that fungicides may soon be history to your committee, maybe they will look a little more long term and give you chance to try and reintroduce fescue and bent. What's the alternative?

Greens, which have had fusarium, which will not recover until the middle of May or even June and fall in quality towards the end of September, that's a five-month season. Will they accept that?

The facts are that a new management strategy for your greens needs to be put in place now to try and swing the poa dominance to a higher percentage of bent and fescue in your sward. For all the clubs that don't act now the future is a fall in quality and revenue and, maybe worse, members leaving your club as they seek those courses which have better prepared firm dry fescue playing surfaces all year round as opposed to playing temporary greens for five months in winter as the thatched, wet, diseased yellow poa greens at their present club are unplayable.

I am the first to admit you will never be 100% Poa free but with poa in the minority you have a chance for quick true greens.

Chris Haspell is Greenkeeping Consultant to the Danish Golf Union.

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MELOIDOGYNE

'YELLOW PATCH' ON CREEPING BENTGRASS GREENS

by Dr Kate Entwistle

The purpose of this second article on root-knot nematodes in turfgrasses is to provide some general information on the nematodes themselves and to show some of the results of recent independent research that proves these nematodes to be the cause of the yellow patches seen over the past four years on creeping bentgrass greens in the UK and Ireland.

In the previous article, I detailed the evidence that was collated from over 20 golf courses across the UK and Ireland which showed that the incidence of large, yellowing patches of creeping bentgrass turf was consistently associated with a root-knot nematode infection. To be absolutely certain of this and to calm the resulting scepticism that followed this diagnosis, Headland Amenity funded independent research to show whether or not this identified cause for the turf symptoms was indeed correct. Before looking at the results of this research, it may be useful to have a few facts and some general information on these root-knot nematodes – they are after all, a relatively new turfgrass pest as far as cool season turf management is concerned.

Root-knot nematodes belong to the nematode genus *Meloidogyne*. Nematodes are unsegmented roundworms, most of which are microscopic (not visible by the naked eye) and are generally translucent (without colour) making them virtually impossible to see in affected rootzones without the aid of a microscope. Many nematodes are elongated but some, like the female root-knot nematode, swell and become more spherical as adults. Nematodes in general feed on over 3000 plant species worldwide and although some may be able to cause damage to several plant types, there are those that are less common which are very host specific. It is worth remembering that not all nematodes cause damage to plants and some are beneficial in the rootzone feeding on rotting plant debris. Some plant parasitic (damage or disease causing) nematodes live mostly on the outside of the plant roots (in a comparable manner to that in which greenfly feed on plant shoots) while others live the majority of their lives inside the root tissues affecting water and nutrient uptake and movement. Although nematodes will vary between genera (and species), their life cycles are roughly similar. They develop from eggs through four larval (or juvenile) stages to become adults. In most species, nematodes hatch from the egg as second-stage juveniles (J2) and these move through the rootzone in water films searching for a host on which to feed. Males may or may not be necessary for completion of the nematode life cycle. Most nematodes complete a lifecycle from egg to adult in about three to six weeks and some juveniles are able to withstand periods of desiccation.

The female root-knot nematode is what's called a sedentary endoparasite of roots, which means that after emerging from the egg she very quickly makes her way inside a root and spends the rest of her life embedded inside the root tissues. Males and juveniles may be found moving freely in the rootzone. Root-knot nematodes cause general unthriftiness, stunting, chlorosis and nutrient deficiencies to infected



PHOTO 1: General appearance of the yellow patches on the creeping bentgrass greens

plants. These plants may wilt on hot days and severely infected plants may even die. Infection by these nematodes causes a complete change in the functioning (or physiology) of the turfgrass plant. The most notable changes are the development of swollen cells in the roots that form the visible root-knots or galling which is always associated with their infection.

Although these nematodes are microscopic and, until now not recognised as potential pests of cool-season turfgrasses, their effects on the sward can be quite dramatic. Many nematode types can cause a general decline of the affected turfgrass areas with large areas of the turf showing general symptoms of stress. I have always considered that the best way to identify a possible nematode infection is when the sward appears to be suffering from drought but it doesn't actually need watering, or it appears to need a feed but the nutrition is adequate. Overall, turf that looks 'unthrifty' or in need of 'some attention', when you know that nothing is lacking with regard to its maintenance, this is a sward that may well have a problem with nematodes. As for the root-knot nematode, the symptoms are a little different. Although affected turfgrass plants still have these same general characteristics, the affected area of the sward is much more clearly defined and, as in these cases, can appear as very distinct patches on the turf surface. In the case of these yellow patches that we have been investigating on courses across the UK and Ireland, we know that the nematode present is a root-knot nematode (*Meloidogyne*) but more importantly, that it is a new