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Winter course management Q&A

As the UK shivers through another cold snap, Jim Cook finds out what plans greenkeepers have been putting in place for the winter months

Moortown GC, taken by Michael Joyce, a top 12 winner in the BIGGA Photo Comp 2012

Andrew Geddes – Clitheroe GC



1 What kind of projects do you tackle during winter months?

Fairway drainage, levelling and improving tee surfaces, bunker renovations, improving walkways, woodland management and dealing with e-mails from members.

2 If a winter project will be disruptive to play, how do you manage this?

We discuss the programme of work six months in advance with the appropriate committee, and produce a monthly course report informing members of the winter projects. Depending on the size of the project, holes may be closed down or shortened.

3 When would you bring in contractors to undertake winter projects?

Ground conditions at Clitheroe aren't suitable for contractors in the winter, although we have used Duncan Ross to install drains in the summer.

4 Are there ways to minimise a winter project being affected by the weather?

Yes, provide discreet hard standing access areas to the parts of the course where the winter project is taking place, also use boards and ground guards for shorter runs. Try not to leave soil exposed to the elements.

5 If there is pressure to complete a project before spring how do you deal with this?

We focus on finishing our major ground work before Christmas, smaller projects and woodland management commence in the New Year.

Andrew Mannion – Southerndown GC



1 What kind of projects do you tackle during the winter months?

Mostly bunker rebuilding work; we are currently installing EnviroBunker using old Astroturf which will take us about three winters to complete the whole course. We'll also be resurfacing and building several tees and managing gorse on the golf course.

2 If a winter project will be disruptive to play, how do you manage this?

Before any work starts it will be advertised on notice boards and also the club's website. Because the bulk of our work is bunker related at the moment we use drop zones on any bunkers that are GUR to speed up play and stop any confusion.

3 When would you bring in contractors to undertake winter projects?

We're lucky to have a good selection of equipment to enable us to carry out everything in house, I'm also very lucky to have a good team of greenkeepers to work alongside who are able to facilitate the work.

4 Are there ways to minimise a winter project being affected by the weather?

Yes we have become very reactive to the weather, being proactive and planning has gone out the window the last few years as it's too hard to stick to a plan, so we go flat out in good weather conditions.

5 If there is pressure to complete a project before spring how do you deal with this?

We tend to just prioritise and anything that can be carried over to the following autumn/winter season will be. I'm lucky the club understand that over the last few years the weather has played a significant part in what we can complete.

Gordon Brammah – Hallamshire GC



1 What kind of projects do you tackle during the winter months?

Many and varied depending on a number of factors including course development policies, budget restrictions, available equipment and the weather. We have built new tees, putting greens and stone walls, installed drainage systems and improved paths, and every bunker on the course has been rebuilt.

2 If a winter project will be disruptive to play, how do you manage this?

Communication. Members are more likely to complain about disruption if they are not kept informed about work on the course. A monthly greens report posted in the clubhouse or better still on the club's website will head off many awkward questions later on.

3 When would you bring in contractors to undertake winter projects?

Contractors would be used for three main reasons – if specialist equipment is required, if specialist skills are required and if a project has to be completed within a limited timescale. An honest assessment has to be made by the club before pressure is put on to do the work in house.

4 Are there ways to minimise a winter project being affected by the weather?

Planning is the key. Getting major projects completed early in the autumn/winter before the weather closes in will give more time for the course to recover. Have contingency plans for if the weather causes serious delay and don't be overambitious with the number and scale of projects planned.

5 If there is pressure to complete a project before spring, how do you deal with this?

Developing a good relationship with the members and the greens committee is essential. Course managers should resist taking on projects that are not properly planned and funded and they must fit into a realistic winter programme.

Robert Patterson – Royal Aberdeen GC



1 What kind of projects do you tackle during winter months?

Bunker work, rebuilding and extending teeing areas, and an intensive aeration programme on all areas with vertidrains and hollow coring machines. We started a five-year plan last year to rebuild seven greens on the main links, to remove the very old root zone material. We are doing the 18th green at the moment.

2 If a winter project will be disruptive to play, how do you manage this?

All our work plans are discussed at committee level three to five months prior to being done. The information is then fed to the members through the notice board, website and newsletter. If temporary greens are required they are prepared well in advance and the membership will be aware of the conditions to expect.

3 When would you bring in contractors to undertake winter projects?

Normally we would do all our work in house but we are using contractors to rebuild our greens as they have the proper equipment and expertise to do the work alongside the architect employed by the club. Any large drainage work would also be sub contracted to someone in that field.

4 Are there ways to minimise a winter project being affected by weather?

To a point but normally the weather dictates how much you can achieve. We always try and get the bulk of our winter work done before Christmas. We start projects early in October to make the best of the good weather. We would normally leave aeration work for wetter days so that at least the operator is inside a tractor cab.

5 If there is pressure to complete a project before spring how do you deal with this?

Get it done early. We need to have these greens we are rebuilding back in play by April so we have completed the work by the end of November. Planning work and communication is very important so that everybody concerned knows what is required of them in the coming weeks and months.

Robert Ransome – Diss GC



1 What kind of projects do you tackle during the winter months?

During the winter months we'll complete a variety of projects such as building and erecting nesting boxes, tee box construction, drainage installation and ecology rough and woodland management.

You get real satisfaction from completing a project and knowing that however big or small it has made an improvement to the course.

2 If a winter project will be disruptive to play, how do you manage this?

We always plan ahead to ensure that everything is done to minimise time and disruption to play. We communicate to our members via notice boards, emails and newsletters and in most of our construction projects we also provide pictures of what these areas will look like once completed.

3 When would you bring in contractors to undertake winter projects?

Although we make every effort to keep as much project work in house, plant machinery, irrigation installation and tree spading contractors are brought in. The expertise, knowledge and experience that come with the contractors we use are invaluable.

4 Are there ways to minimise winter projects being affected by the weather?

For the last 3-4 years we've balanced out our winter programmes to give us options, so if projects get put on hold, we can temporarily switch over to another until we can resume. Generally, if a project is safe and ground disruption is minimal we'll stick with it.

5 If there is pressure to complete a project before spring how do you deal with this?

I dedicate two or three members of the team to daily course preparation. When monitoring progress, if we come under pressure to complete I have the options of either additional hours or increasing project staff numbers. This may come at a temporary cost to the course.

It's snow joke as winter bites

We chat to a technical expert to find out how to prevent turf diseases as the snow falls



With a hard winter forecast for this year, the chance of snow cover is a strong possibility. Greenkeepers are reminded not to underestimate the risk of *Typhula incarnata* to cause Grey snow mould or *Fusarium patch* (*Microdochium nivale*) developing into Pink snow mould, should greens be subject to snow.

Dorin Pop, Technical Manager at Bayer, explains that snow cover prevents photosynthesis, reducing the plant metabolism which weakens the turf's natural defence system.

The snow cover also encourages contact with the snow mould pathogen. Pink snow mould may occur following growth of *Fusarium patch* from the organic matter in conducive conditions.

He adds: "The snow also incubates the turf to an extent. This creates a microclimate which will keep the turf surface moist and unfrozen providing an ideal habitat for disease to thrive.

"The two diseases most commonly associated with the winter months are Grey snow mould and Pink snow mould.

"Both Grey snow mould and Pink snow mould require periods of cold, wet weather to develop, but Grey snow mould is very localised in the UK. This is because the turf needs to have prolonged snow cover in order for the disease pathogen to develop. For this reason it tends to occur in Scotland and the north of England."

He adds that Pink snow mould is actually the same strain of *Fusarium patch* that normally occurs during the year when the conditions are favourable but as the snow melts, white to pink mycelium develops around the margin of patches. Unlike Grey snow mould, this can occur quite quickly under the snow as the pathogens take less time to develop.

"The disease pathogen can survive adverse conditions in plants or organic matter but the disease symptoms are only observed in the winter and early spring encouraged by low temperatures, high moisture in the turf, long grass, excessive nitrogen and excessive top dressing just prior to snow cover. Just like controlling *Fusarium patch* at any other time of the year, applying a fungicide at the very early stage of disease will avoid any potential scarring of the turf. This is especially important in the winter due to the slow rate of turf growth. Any scarring will take much longer to repair in the colder months and with the expectation now to be

able to play golf all year round, prolonged periods of unplayable turf conditions are unlikely to be met favourably."

During the autumn, golf courses tend to undergo renovation. The activities associated with renovation put a great deal of stress on the turf. Dorin explains that good practice is to maximise their maintenance programme prior to this period. Activities include applying the correct fertiliser, avoiding heavy top dressing, removing any fallen leaves in the autumn and adjusting the height of cut as well as reviewing the sward composition.

He adds that the fundamentals for preventing winter turf disease lie in maintaining good practices throughout the year. "If due diligence is paid to cultural practices throughout the autumn, alongside a robust fungicide programme, greenkeepers will really help safeguard their turf throughout the winter."

As well as delivering appropriate cultural practices in the run up to the cold weather, Dorin advises greenkeepers to apply the fungicides preventatively before the first snow when the ground is not frozen. "Providing the label instructions are adhered to, this treatment should protect the turf while the snow is lying on top."

However, he notes that if a greenkeeper does experience a situation where snow has fallen on an unprotected green, a contact fungicide can be applied just after snow melt, directly to where the disease symptoms are visible. "Providing the snow hasn't been lying too long and the disease isn't too advanced, this should help prevent any further development."

When considering appropriate products to use in these situations, he explains that Bayer's product *Dedicate*® has both a contact and systemic mode of action which offers long-term preventative and early curative control of turf disease.

"I'd recommend that *Dedicate*® should be used up until the stage when the temperature drops significantly and the turf ceases to grow. After that, once the soil temperature drops, I'd suggest using *Chipco*® Green. It's a contact fungicide which will remain effective following snow melt and will offer a good level of protection throughout the snow cover."

He adds that if there is sign of disease after the snow has thawed, then an immediate application of *Chipco*® Green is recommended. "*Dedicate*® can then be used once



the weather begins to warm up and the grass begins to grow again."

Although there may be a temptation to remove the snow from the greens, doing so will inflict added stress and damage to the turf beneath and should be avoided. Walking on the greens when there is heavy snow or frost cover is also not recommended due to compaction.

Dorin adds that frost presents an entirely different challenge to the turf. "Frost actually halts the development of disease pathogens, so in that respect it actually works in a greenkeeper's favour. However it is often counterproductive because although the disease is restrained,



ABOVE: Examples of pink patch

"Greenkeepers will face much less of a challenge if they adopt a preventative approach to combatting disease"

it is essentially dormant. In the meantime, the frost significantly weakens mainly *Poa* swards, therefore making it more susceptible to the disease pathogens that are still there and that become active once the conditions become favourable.

"Greenkeepers will face much less of a challenge if they adopt a preventative approach to combatting disease.

"While Bayer's *Chipco*® Green and *Dedicate*® have curative properties, the fact that snow could remain on the ground for long periods of time preventing greenkeepers from getting to the turf could have damaging results.

"By the time it melts, the damage could be quite significant and during a period of slow growth, its repair could be long and difficult. In this instance, prevention is certainly the best approach."



Dorin Pop, Technical Manager at Bayer

Future shock?



James de Haviland urges you to keep up to date with developments in the machinery world

Take a look back over the past 10, 15 or even 20 years and it is clear that whilst some equipment has just got larger and more sophisticated, other items of kit have helped introduce new techniques such as precision overseeding and precise aeration. But what is the next big thing you should be aware of?

At present, the market for totally autonomous mowers is still in its infancy with models, such as the Etesia Robot, having won favour with those seeking a straightforward maintenance mowing system. But the Etesia can be set up to collect golf balls as it mows and only cut grass where it is needed. It's fitted with five discs running at 3,500rpm. The unit is designed to leave a clean finish over frequently mown turf. Height of cut can be adjusted to between 22mm to 88mm. Workrate is put at 3,600 m²/hr, one machine having the potential to keep up to Up to

20,000m² under control. The unit only mows grass that needs cutting, working at random and returning to a fixed charge point when it runs low on power.

Twenty years ago, a self-propelled fairway mower was seen as something only well-off golf clubs could afford. For some, even a powered hydraulic gang was considered something of a fairway mowing luxury, drag gang sets earning their stripes on many a fairway well into the nineties and beyond. These days, trailed gangs still have a place but ride-on fairway mowers dominate, their cost to performance ratio making them 'affordable' for even less well-off courses.

Other items of kit that have become 'mainstream' include aerators. Again, some may get the forks out to aerate a green but not many. And by aeration it is also worth remembering that hollow coring, deep aeration and the manner in which wide area aeration to include fairways can now be carried out is

something a previous generation of greenkeepers would wonder at.

So, what is the big news in machinery development these days? That is not an easy question to answer. As an industry, the golf sector saw great expansion from the 1980s and with it the levels of mechanisation rapidly increased. The last three decades have really seen some new ideas make their mark. Now, however, it could be argued that product development has perhaps overtaken innovation.

If you could drive a 1990s era fairway or greens mower alongside a 2012 model you would appreciate that development is every bit as important as innovation.

For some this may be seen as an opportunity to suggest you can quietly overlook machinery developments and concentrate upon other aspects of course maintenance. This is to overlook those developments happening all the time. Some are not going to make a revolutionary change to the way

ABOVE: Baroness LM283
BELOW: the Etesia Robot



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“In ten years time, will you wonder why you had not given electrical power a go earlier? You can’t take your eye off the ball”

a course is tended, but they could help save some time or do a job more efficiently.

The key is to keep an eye out for changes, be prepared to try new equipment and not shy away from demonstrations. A good example is to consider a hybrid mower or one with full battery power. Think gang mowers versus ride-on and petrol versus diesel fuelling.

In ten years time, will you wonder why you had not given electrical power a go earlier? You can’t take your eye off the ball.

With a 49hp engine and five gangs, the Toro Reelmaster 7000-D is right at the heavy end of fairway mowers, with the capacity to cope with fast growing grass in a season typified by 2012. It offers a 3.07m width of cut and can be set to mow between 6.35mm to 63.5mm. Of course this model is not for everyone but never has there been so much choice. Unless you look you may miss out on a model that is best suited to your specific needs.

Now consider a mainstream model, the John Deere 8500E E-Cut Hybrid mower followed the 2500E greens mower to the UK market, the former first being launched back in 2005. Although this type of mower is not fully electric, hybrids have done a lot to help the all-electric cause, the motors

powering the cutting units having proven dependable and efficient.

The Jacobsen Eclipse 322 in its all-electric guise was first seen in 2009, this mower doing away with not just an internal combustion engine but hydraulics too.

Plug in mowing may take a while to become mainstream but few can argue against the appeal of the technology. It has variable mowing speeds to a maximum of 9 km/h and transport speeds up to 14.5km/h. The all-important frequency of cut or clip rate can be adjusted from 1.27mm to 6.35mm for the 11-blade cylinder and 2.03mm to 9.91mm for the 7-cylinder option.

Utility vehicles have long had the option of electric power, but those looking for a general purpose unit that is at home in easy going as it is coping with tougher terrain may prefer a petrol or diesel engine.

The Cushman Hauler 1200X electric model could change that with its 450kg capacity and power to cope with steep going. Payload is a generous 450kg and maximum speed will be around 25km/h.

Do you know what has changed in the utility vehicle market? Have you tried an e-Gator from John Deere or Toro MDX with battery power?

Baroness mowers, such as



LM283, have no electronics and employ simple levers to raise and lower the units. Options run to 5, 7 or 9 blades and collectors. No groomers or brushes, just easy to adjust and well made cutting units. It has straightforward hydraulics and simple all-wheel traction, but do not confuse this with poor mowing ability. The units are precision items.

So the question remains - do you know just how much equipment choice you have these days?

INSET ABOVE: Cushman Hauler 1200X electric and MAIN ABOVE: the Jacobsen Eclipse 322

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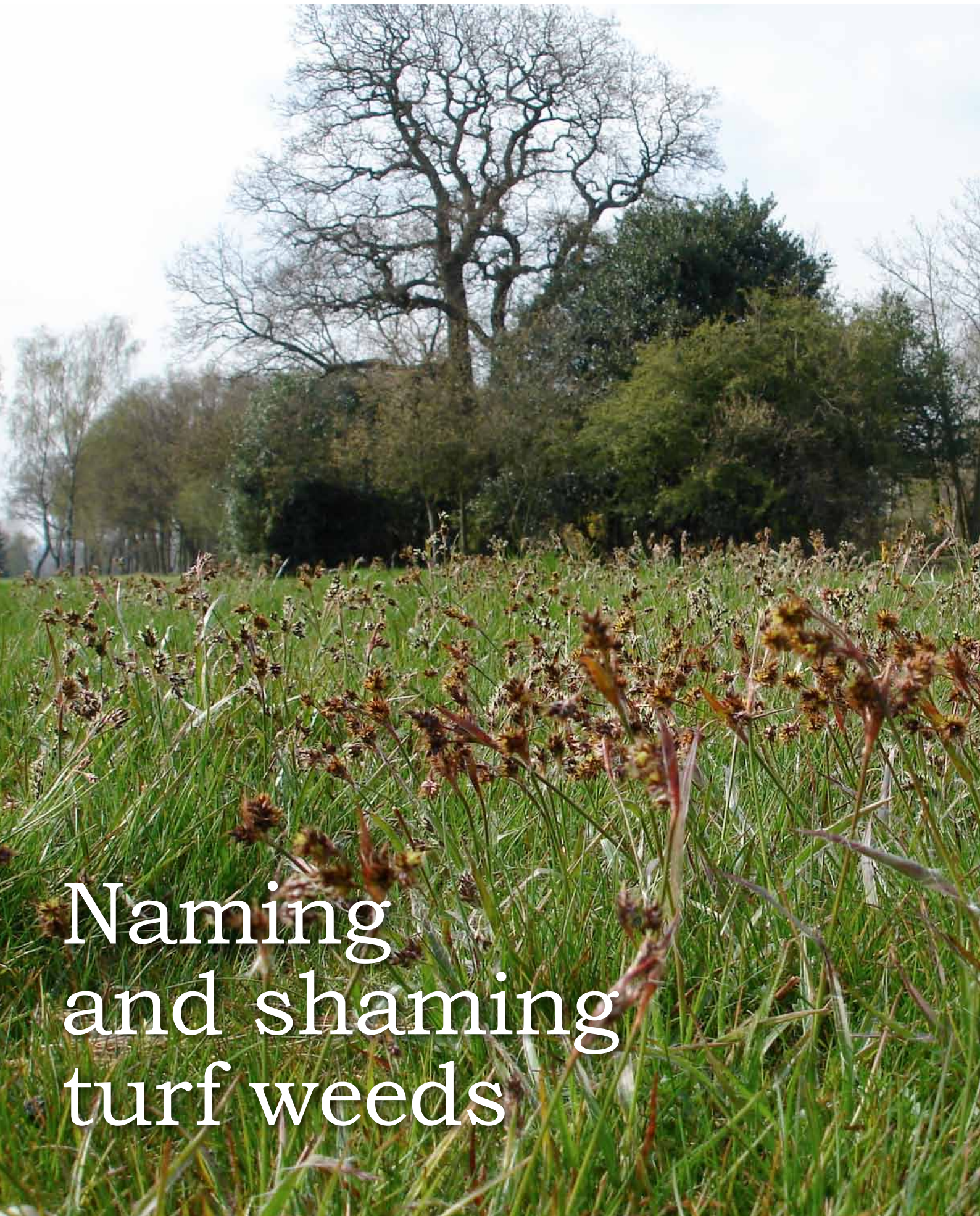
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