

Road Trip

Three days in Naples were not nearly enough to see all that we would have liked to see

By Shelly Foy

In the past I have had many opportunities to travel the state, giving talks and checking out environmental projects on golf courses. I call those days BT (before Thomas). I just never realized how much I missed getting out and about until my recent road trip to Naples. I received two phone calls about coming over and doing Audubon recertification site visits to Royal Poinciana and Foxfire. What followed those phone calls were three of the most

enjoyable days I have had in a long time.

Todd Lowe and I are both Audubon Stewards, so I called Todd and asked him if he would like to meet me for both site visits and a few stop-bys. Todd, the ever agreeable person that he is, said “Sure, just tell me when.”

Foxfire Country Club, Naples

Superintendent Jon Vingson, General Manager Brian Heidel, and Audubon Coordinator Harold Dowell took us on a tour of the golf course. Foxfire has been a member of the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program since 1993 and fully certified since 1998. The members have a group called the “Nature Group,” headed by Dowell,

and they host several fundraisers each year to help support their Audubon-related projects. Their motto: “Just nice folks having fun – nature’s way – at Foxfire!” These are definitely my kind of people!

Foxfire leadership takes its ACSP very seriously and everyone works hard at maintaining the environmental integrity of the property. The club has some exciting projects under way, and in particular I am sure the members are looking forward to the new clubhouse that was under construction at the time of our visit. The highlight for me, however, was the bald eagle that swooped down over the lake, picked up a fish, flew right over our heads and landed in a nearby tree to have lunch! I’m still not quite sure how they arranged for the eagle to perform on



A serious amount of wildlife can get through this corridor! I know it looks small in this picture, but my guess would be that it is about 20 ft. wide. Photo by Shelly Foy.



If you look closely at the picture, perhaps you can see the fish that this eagle caught for lunch! Photo by Shelly Foy.

cue like that, but it was very impressive! Foxfire has had nesting eagles on its course for several years now. The golfers at this course seem to take these eagles in stride, but for me it was splendid!

Royal Poinciana Golf Club, Naples

Superintendent Matt Taylor is one lucky guy. Not only does he get to work at such a beautiful place every day, but I hope he knows how fortunate he is to have built such a great team around him. Office Manager Jean Mears, and Assistant Superintendent Kirsten Conover are both knowledgeable and helpful with all of the Audubon projects that are going on at RP, and they are numerous. A lot of courses are including nature walks in their yearly program, and RP even has one for grandchildren! Other highlights:

- Since 2000, the club has converted more than 20 acres of maintained turfgrass to naturalized areas. It has eliminated at least 24 sprinkler heads and converted more than 140 full-circle heads to part-circle heads, resulting in an annual reduction of more than 2 million gallons of water. All sprinkler-head nozzles around greens have been reduced to smaller sizes, resulting in a further reduction of approximately 4 million gallons of water each year.



This particular mat at Twin Eagles had broken away from its anchor and Sean graciously left it where it was so that Todd and I could get a first-hand look at how it was put together. Photo by Shelly Foy.

- The club has removed close to 5 acres of noxious, exotic plant material and planted more than 400 native trees. More than 25,000 native grass plants have replaced bermudagrass, more than 22,000 aquatic plants have been added to the lakes and common grounds, and 15,000 sq. ft. of wildflowers have been planted in test plots around the golf course.

- Royal Poinciana renovated the front nine of the Cypress Course last year and is renovating the back nine this summer. Granted, the main reason for renovation was playability but the side benefits definitely included some very nice environmental enhancements. Matthew has a great love and respect for the environment and it shows in the renovation of the Cypress front nine, and it also shows in his vision for the entire property.

Wyndemere Country Club, Naples

Superintendent Peter Metcalf has to be one of the nicest people in the golf industry. He is so down to earth, practical and hard working, and I had a great time visiting Wyndemere. Pete has two really neat projects that I was anxious to see; an under-



The cup holes for the plants are precut and you can chose from a variety of aquatic plants. Photo by Shelly Foy.

planting program and a Native Orchid Restoration Project.

According to the Native Orchid Restoration Project, a 501(c)3 non-profit organization, Collier County is the orchid capital of the nation and has more orchid species than any other place in the country, including Hawaii. Pete happens to be fortunate enough to have a member, Tom Coffey, who is involved with this project. Coffey has helped educate Pete and his staff about the native orchid species, and whenever Wyndemere removes trees, any native orchids found are moved to visible areas on the golf course. The result is not only saving these threatened or endangered orchid species, but education of the membership as well.

Peter also has a great underplanting program. Every year he buys a supply of small “Densa” pine trees and many other native understory plants and raises them in the club’s nursery. Once the trees are large enough, they are transplanted onto the golf course. Not only is the club saving a lot of money, but since it has been doing this for many years, the varying tree height is visually appealing as well.

The Old Collier Golf Club, Naples

I am always at a loss on what to say

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about Tim Hiers. I will just leave it at this: It is my opinion that the golf industry of not just Florida, but the entire country, should say a prayer of thanks every day for this man.

I have visited The Old Collier Golf Club before, but had only been to the maintenance facility. I was really looking forward to seeing the golf course. On the morning of our visit, the sky opened up and it was raining like crazy. Tim wisely decided to stay inside, but Todd and I ventured out with a map that Tim had given us of all the lightning shel-

ters. After touring a few golf holes I remember thinking how far this industry has come (big thanks to Tim), that golfers now are willing to accept such a “natural” look rather than a wall-to-wall manicured look. The Old Collier Golf Club is one of a kind, and it is spectacular!

The Club at Twin Eagles, Naples

I had been hoping to visit Twin Eagles again, and for two reasons. One was because I had recently heard a talk by Susan Watts, senior vice-

president of development with the Bonita Bay Group. Susan mentioned that Collier County was enlarging Immokelee Road, the major highway in front of the club, to four lanes, and that the Bonita Bay Group was building a wildlife corridor beneath this major road expansion. They also own the property across the street, and now wildlife will have a corridor to pass between both properties. I really did not get into the specifics of who paid for what, and how much it cost. I was just thrilled that it was being done, whatever the reason.

Environmental Education

Black Diamond Ranch’s Cunningham Develops Insect-ID Program for Students

John Cunningham, CGCS, golf course superintendent at Black Diamond Ranch in Lecanto, recently organized and held a two-day event designed to teach sixth-grade students about insects. He taught classes in insect physiology and identification at a local school on the first day, and invited 150 students and their teachers to his golf course the second day.

Cunningham’s goal is eventually to involve schools statewide in studying insect life cycles as part of their science classes so they learn biology and provide information that golf courses can use to effectively and efficiently apply pesticides for the least impact on the environment. He says his plan is a real win-win situation that will let the kids make a real contribution in helping the environment and help superintendents be better stewards also.



Cunningham, center, shows students how he uses light traps to capture beetles and determine threshold levels for timely pesticide applications. Light traps were provided by Bayer Environmental Science to help facilitate applications of Merit insecticide.

Cunningham hopes to grow the program locally, then spread it to the county level and then take it statewide. He hopes to develop a

simple hands-on template that any golf course superintendent or association can follow and implement in his or her own community.

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Secondly, Superintendent Sean Duffy had convinced Steve Beeman of Beeman's Nursery, an expert in aquatic plants among other things, to install his new "Floating Plant Mat," which is basically a floating aquatic island, complete with plants. For those of you who struggle with fluctuating water tables and not being able to maintain plants around lakes, it is not hard to visualize the benefit.

Steve believes that the value of aquatic plants to lakes is that they:

- Provide Habitat
- Produce Oxygen
- Take Up Nutrients

These floating mats come in 2-ft. sections, and are linked and attached to make whatever size you want. The mat is anchored far enough off-shore that the roots cannot reach the lake bottom; therefore water table fluctuations don't affect it. Steve has seen small alligators climb up onto these mats, so you know birds would have no problem perching on them. We were amazed at the root system on these plants, and the amount of bait fish under this mat was unbelievable! We saw an alligator swimming close by, and you can only imagine how happy the frogs and salamanders were.

This particular mat was glued together, but Steve tells me he is working with a company to develop a nylon staple for future use. He has been working on this concept for a while now, and his

first container load of stapled matting, one acre's worth, is expected in July. A half-acre of this product has already been spoken for by The Villages. I always thought Steve Beeman was a pretty clever guy, and I can't wait to see what he comes up with next.

Once we left Twin Eagles, it was seriously raining, but I couldn't leave Naples without stopping by to see Mark Black. Mark, John and I are very good friends and Mark and I even share the same birthday! He is the one person that will call five times a day during hurricanes to yell at us for not leaving and coming to his house, and also to check on us to make sure we are okay. He is a classic worrier, and I love him dearly. Anyway, we stopped by the Taj Mahal that he calls his office and wiled away a lovely rainy day hour catching up with Mark and being serenaded by Charlie Riger and his guitar. The perfect end to our trip!

More Road Trips Planned

I was very impressed with all of the golf courses that we visited on our road trip. The EGCSA as a whole, appears to be committed to environmental issues and its member golf courses have been proactive in that arena. I believe that something like 70 percent or more of EGCSA-member golf courses are enrolled in the ACSP. The bottom-line message for the rest of the state is that

we can't depend on one group to carry the load for everyone. If you think that environmental issues are going to go away, then you really need to get out more.

There are a couple of things that dawned on me while in Naples that I really want to follow up on. I was astounded at the amount of money golf courses are spending on noxious exotic plant removal. I'm really curious about the reasons for this commitment. Is it mandated? Are you doing it because it is the right thing to do, etc? Give me a call or send me an e-mail on this topic because I am definitely going to write about this in the future.

Secondly, I really think there is a need to talk more about master planning, particularly for the landscape of golf courses. Superintendents change, general managers change, committees change, and usually each person has a unique opinion of what the landscape should look like. A well-developed plan can save so many headaches down the road, so I am planning to address this issue in the future. You are welcome to go ahead and pick up the phone and call me before I call you. It earns you brownie points.

Anyway, three days in Naples were not nearly enough to see all that I would like to see. Todd and I are planning more "road trips" around the state, so if you want us to stop by your golf course, give us a call.

ACSP Update

Recertified courses in the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary System or courses achieving certification in one or more of the six areas: Environmental Planning, Integrated Pest Management, Outreach & Education, Wildlife Habitat Management, Water Quality Management and Resource Conservation.

Courses attaining recertification in 2005

- Amelia Island Plantation
- Foxfire Golf and Country Club
- Harbour Ridge Yacht & Country Club
- Naples Lakes Country Club
- Royal Poinciana Golf Club,
- The Dunes Golf & Tennis Club
- The Moorings Country Club
- TPC at Eagle Trace
- TPC at Sawgrass
- Windstar Country Club
- World Woods Golf Club,

Courses attaining certification in several areas in 2005

- Lakewood Ranch G&CC, Bradenton: Environmental Planning and Wildlife Habitat Management
- Ritz-Carlton Golf Club & Spa, Jupiter: Environmental Planning and Resource Conservation

Welcome and congratulations to these new ACSP members

- Bald Peak Colony Club, Ralph Beckett, Naples
- Beachview Golf Club, Ken Noble, Sanibel Island
- Cedar Hammock Golf and Country Club, Paul Mollburg, Naples
- Country Creek Golf Club, Dayton Simpson, Estero
- Crandon Golf Course, Carlos Mcleon, Key Biscayne
- Summerfield Crossing Golf Club, James Sharpe, Riverview

"It is quite fascinating to watch such small bird species prevail as the loggerhead shrike as it hunts for its food, flying from one tree or shrub to another looking either for an insect of some sort or a lizard, which might be the delicatessen to



them. As time permits, watch these little guys catch their insects and where they may take them to eat. Most of the time with its sharp bill you may find a shrike impaling his meal on a small spike or branch on a limb in a tree. This particular one was fluttering from plant to plant in an ilex schillings bed where he continuously took his catches up into black olive trees. Once the meal has been placed, he then will enjoy it from the skewer. So if you ever wonder why that exoskeleton of and insect or skeleton from a lizard maybe hanging on a spike or small branch in a tree, remember the vigilant little shrike." Photo by Brian Beckner

WildSide

Audubon Tour Leadership 101

By Craig Weyandt

In this article, I will tell you how I started and eventually conducted my own Audubon tours at my golf course. I cannot remember where the idea came from to conduct an Audubon tour on the golf course but it may have been from hearing about what Tim Hires and others are doing by inviting school children to come to their golf course for a tour.

I know my golfing members see the course almost every day but I want them to slow down and see things from a different point of view. These tours give me a chance to take not

only golfing members but social and tennis members as well and look at something other than tees, greens and fairways. I can talk to a captive audience about what positive benefits golf courses have on wildlife and the environment.

I hope this information will serve as a guide and inspire you to conduct your own Audubon tours at your golf course. Heck, if I can do it, anyone can do it. What you will gain is a community that is better educated on the work you do to conserve water, wildlife and enhance the environment. It will also bring a greater understanding of the plant and animal communi-



Superintendent Craig Weyandt (standing on the edge of the green) conducts periodic Audubon tours of The Moorings Club to share with his members the positive impact golf courses can have on the environment. Photo by K. Leah Stephens.

ties in which you work every day.

As with most superintendents, I have always had a love for nature. This love for nature only increased after I starting working at The Moorings Club in 2001. Each day, as I would go out onto the golf course, I was greeted by many coastal birds, butterflies and other small mammals and reptiles. I already knew the names of



A cooperative osprey perches with a freshly caught fish for a photo op during one of The Moorings Club's Audubon Tours. Photo by Ullin W. Leavell Jr.

most of the mammals before I started working at the club, but I don't think I could name but a handful of the birds and none of the butterflies.

With the world's largest library online and a variety of Audubon books at my fingertips, I researched the identity of the birds I saw on the course that day. One of my favorite and most used books is the "National Audubon Society Field Guide to Florida." It is a regional guide for birds, animals, trees, wildflowers, insects, weather, nature preserves, and more.

It seemed the more research I did, the more my interest was piqued. Finding the name of what I saw was definitely the hardest part, but getting more information about a correctly identified bird or mammal was easy. I mainly use books for identification and I use the Internet for more detailed information. I sort through all of the information I have gathered and condense it into a short article for the club's newsletter.

Wildlife articles are a great way for members and guests to associate wildlife with golf courses in a positive light. Members have told me that the nature section of the newsletter is their favorite part and they always look forward to reading it.

I always write something positive in the club's newsletter even, if it's just a small turf fact. If there is a problem on the course, the newsletter may not be the best place to air dirty laundry. By the time the newsletter makes it to print, the information may not be timely and I'm sure a tennis player could care less about turf problems. I figure all members (golf, social, tennis, etc.) are going to receive the newsletter, so let's make the articles either positive about turf or nature. So just by writing the articles for the club newsletter, I learned about the local birds and animals. You may not remember everything about a particular bird you have researched but try to remember a key fact or two to talk about on an Audubon Tour. If you can't remember, then take a book or "cheat" cards with you. Trust me, no one will mind.

Even after you have researched and gathered all of the information for your tour, you may not feel comfortable speaking in front of a group or doing the tour by yourself. No problem. All you have to do is call an expert. Just about everywhere in the state of Florida, you can find someone from an environmental learning center or from the local Audubon society who would be more than glad to come to your course and help you conduct the tour.

On my last tour, I invited someone from the local Environmental Learning Center

not because I felt uncomfortable but just to help add something to the tour. It was perfect! We conducted the tour together and both learned a lot about each other's area of expertise.

For example, I learned that Ospreys are either right-taloned or left-taloned just like we are either left-handed or right-handed. I also learned that butterflies don't like mulch and would prefer a rock to sun on. When you give

Plan on having someone from your staff or another department take pictures while conducting the tour. They make great photos for your club newsletter or bulletin board.

these little facts to your members and guests, you hear the "ooh"s and "aw"s that rival those to fireworks on the 4th of July. Well, maybe not quite as much as the 4th of July, but you got the idea.

Planning a route for your tour is very important. You should know how long it will take to complete your Audubon tour. When I walk nine holes at my golf course, it typically takes around an hour and 15 minutes with stopping and talking. Take your planned route and practice with someone to see how long it will take you. Discuss the wildlife that you see while you are walking. Remember, there is always the chance that you may not see much wildlife on your Audubon tour. This may be because of bad weather or just the large group of people walking around, but seeing wildlife is never a guarantee. You should plan on other things to talk about.

I always make it a point to talk about the Florida state tree (sabal palm) and correct pruning practices. By leaving the boots on the sabal palm, you leave a nesting site for mourning doves; and by leaving the seed pods on, you help feed migratory and overwintering birds. After all, the tree is self-pruning and brown leaves naturally fall off in time.

I also like to stop at the irrigation system's weather station and talk about what it does for the golf course. When we speak of irrigation, I tell the group that I'm not a water user but a water purifier. I explain how we use effluent

water for irrigation and the turf filters out nutrients and returns the water cleaner to the surficial aquifer. If you think about it, I bet your course has many interesting facts that you would just love share and never had the chance.

All you need to do now is pick a date for the Audubon tour. Make sure this date does not conflict with any other departments at your facility. Communication as always is the key to success. Once a date has been chosen, I will advertise the tour in the club's newsletter and make other flyers for around the club. If your club has a website you can also advertise on it.

The information on our flyer includes the date, time of the tour (6:45 coffee, 7 start walking), place to meet, where we plan to walk and what to bring. My office manager does a terrific job of making the flyer for our club. It includes pictures of birds and animals, which makes people stop and take a look to see what the flyer is all about. I suggest you include a contact number for more information.

To stay together, it has been my experience that the smaller the group the better. I normally keep the tours limited to 25 people or less. If you get too many people, there tends to be a lot of chatter and people can't hear. Also with a large group, people tend to fall behind. On some tours I have stopped to talk and looked back only to see the last person in the group is a 100 yards back. While this can afford time for questions it can also really slow up the tour and affect the enjoyment for everyone.

On the day of the tour I arrive for work early so I make sure that I am the first one to the meeting spot. I like to set up a small table with reference books and photos that I have taken of wildlife on the golf course. I also may set up another table with orange juice, coffee and some pastries. Anyone who knows me would say that the food is really just for me but the members enjoy it also. As the members arrive I like to check to see if anyone is unable to walk as we will provide a golf cart if necessary. Plan on having someone from your staff or another department take pictures while conducting the tour. They make great photos for your club newsletter or bulletin board.

And that's it! You are ready to begin your tour. As I tell the members, "I'm not an Audubon expert, but I do have a love of nature and I hope to share that with you today." If you have an interest in conducting your own Audubon Tour and have further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. My information is on the inside cover.