



A spring bird count outing at The Sanctuary Golf Club on Sanibel Island. Photo by Kyle Sweet.

Reach out and Educate

How Audubon International's 'Outreach & Education certification Can Work for You

By Kyle D. Sweet, CGCS

Over the past 15 years, Audubon International's Sanctuary Golf Course Program has grown to include 90 certified golf courses in the state of Florida and a total of 669 certified golf courses worldwide. This increasing popularity has made the word "Audubon" as recognizable in our industry as verti-cutting and topdressing. The increased awareness has gone beyond our offices and maintenance facilities to clubhouses and golf shops.

This means one thing – our golfers know about it too. They know about it from their own club, playing the club across town or maybe a friend's club locally or far away. Is this important to us, our industry and Audubon? The answer is yes.

The six special categories required for certification status help to create a well-rounded, environmentally-sound operation for the participating golf course. Most of the certification sections are topics that we are trained in and are the core essentials of our jobs.

Pesticide Use Reduction, Water Conservation and Water Quality Management are a few section examples that we deal with each and every day.

Obviously, every course is different and each property has its own strengths and challenges when beginning the Audubon Certification process. One section, however – Outreach and Education – may bring about a new adventure in your position as superintendent and you're the one who can steer this part of certification to success. Outreach and Education, two words that may strike fear into many superintendents, can be the highlight of your Audubon Program involvement.

Here are a few tips that I hope help. They have worked for us for the past several years.

Joining Audubon International and creating a committee:

Mailing in your membership fee is a great start, but doesn't get you anywhere if you don't get active. If you're a member, forming a committee to work alongside you is a big step in moving down the road to certification. The committee makeup will vary from club to club, but should include at least you, a club representative (member/owner), your golf professional and possibly an outside volunteer. This volunteer could be a biologist, birder, land manager or the like. The goal

of the committee should be to work together, utilizing individual strengths for the common goal of the program. Meet as often as you need to get the job done. This committee begins your outreach to your club and community.

Schedule activities where members, residents or golfers can join in: These don't have to be complicated and, when beginning, the easier the better. Include the dates for the activities in your club's newsletter, post at your golfer entrance and put a bright reminder in the golf shop. Place anywhere that you can get maximum exposure to your target group. Some activity ideas include:

Native Plant Tour: This tour can take place throughout your course. You know the plants; just share your knowledge with your group. You may have an area expert with your city or county nearby who may be willing to volunteer and co-host the tour. A co-host with additional plant knowledge can be a big help. Following up with a photo recap of your tour with plant identification and a "thanks for touring" letter goes a long way.

Maintenance Facility Open House: If you've been wanting to clean up the shop, schedule one of these tours for your members or golfers. You will look at your shop in a different light when you know guests are coming through the facility. Create scheduled stops, know what you will say and have your assistant, equipment manager, IPM manager and irrigation manager present their respective areas. Highlight your environmental stewardship with your fuel station, mix/load containment area, equipment wash water recycling and equipment repair facilities. They will be impressed and many will be surprised at your level of expertise off of the course.

Spring Bird Count: We know plants and insects, because it's what we do. Now, expand that knowledge of your property to the birds. Birding takes practice and interest and I bet you would be surprised how many birders are out there on your course. Hold a bird count for your club each year and have a sign-up for participants. A six-seater cart is handy to haul the

group around. Contact an area birder who can help with the count and with identification. Many county extension offices have contacts who would probably welcome the opportunity to birdwatch on your course. Their expertise can be the key to success with this and you'll learn more as well.

Wildlife Tour: You know your property and the wildlife it contains. Bring a out a group to search the property for these animals and their habitats. A better understanding of the animals will help to protect them, especially if they are a threatened species such as the gopher tortoise. Passing along your wildlife knowledge to others at your course is an eye-opening experience for them and reinforces your position of a professional environmentally conscious superintendent.

In addition to your hosted tour of the course in search of wildlife, your golfers may want to let you know what

they see out there. It's simple to post a wildlife sighting sheet in the pro shop, locker room or other area at your course. The date, what they saw, where they saw it and how many are data items for the sheet. This information may prove very valuable with your Audubon wildlife inventory and increase your golfer interest.

Announce your accomplishments

If you do any or all of these activities, publicize your accomplishments. Club newsletters, websites and postings for golfer/members are all great outlets for announcing your accomplishments. Group photos, bird count results and the opportunity to get your golfers more involved can go a long way. Your local newspaper is interested about your successful environmental efforts as well. When you become certified in each respective category, announce that achievement. And when the process

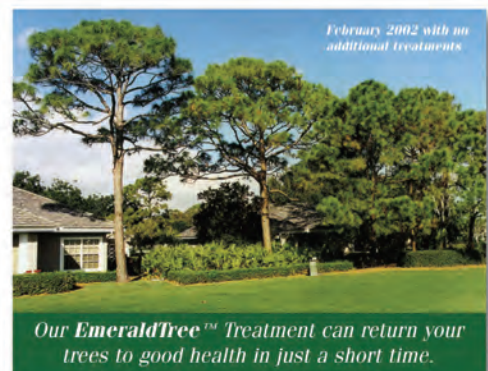
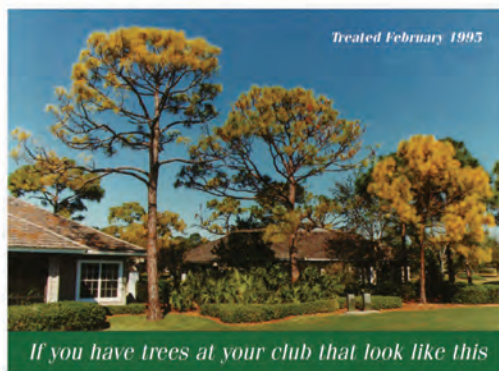
is completed wrap it up in one big press release. Audubon International is pleased to help with formatting the press releases.

Create a Brochure

A brochure of your course wildlife can be a great tool for Outreach and Education. This brochure can be customized to your specific site and can be updated as often as you need to keep current. Copies of the brochure can be mailed to your members, handed to your golfers, and distributed throughout the housing community surrounding your course. You are getting out the word about the wildlife at your club, which is important awareness for everyone.

Outreach and Education can be a terrific satisfying part of your Audubon Program. Invest some time, get creative and make this a fun, educational opportunity for you, your golfers, your staff and the community.

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Signs *Basic Communication Tools*

Using signs as educational tools is an effective way to communicate environmental messages to your golfers. Let's face it, very few superintendents have day-to-day contact with most of the golfers who play their courses. Opportunities to educate golfers are few and far between. Follow the lead of some Florida golf courses, and let signs help you send an environmental message. *— Shelly Foy*



Demonstrate your proactivity and inspire others to care for the environment.



Let golfers know that your course is participating in an environmental program and committed to environmental stewardship.

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