

NEWS IN BRIEF

BROOKTRAILS, Calif. — The saga of the Brooktrails redwoods appears to be over. And some trees won't be happy. The board of directors at the nine-hole Brooktrails Golf Course recently voted 3-2 to cut down a number of redwood trees to save some dying greens and fairways. There are nearly 1,000 trees in the playing area of the northern California course. Arborist John Phillips recommended removing the trees because they keep sunlight from the playing areas and cause greens and fairways to die of excessive moisture. Cutting will begin in the fall.

EDINBURG, Texas — The 18-hole Monte Cristo Golf Course has reopened with a new name, the Palacio Real Golf Course. PalBros Inc. of Edinburg, a city of about 30,000 in southern Texas just a few miles above the border with Mexico, bought the former Monte Cristo in July 1994.

GREENVILLE, S.C. — A proposed lighted, 18-hole, par-3 course near Greenville Downtown Airport has led about 70 neighboring homeowners to sign a petition opposing the project. Residents are concerned with the effect of lights and increased traffic in their secluded neighborhood. The developer and officials of the Greenville Airport Commission, which owns the 29-acre tract, said the \$1 million course would disturb residents less than any other development that can be put on the land, which is restrictively zoned because it is so near the airport.

SHERBURNE, Vt. — Construction of Vermont's first municipal 18-hole golf course here near the Killington ski area is running ahead of schedule. The \$2.8 million Green Mountain National Golf Course could be open by mid-June 1996. J. J. McDonald Inc. of Lyndon Center is the project's general contractor. Gene Bates is the designer.



The 5th hole at Rick Smith's highly touted, debut design at The Treetops Resort in Gaylord, Mich.

Smith: Teaching pro-turned-designer

He's known as golf's Renaissance Man these days. Rick Smith, 37, is perhaps best known as a swing guru for some of the PGA Tour's top players — Jack Nicklaus, Lee Janzen, Billy Andrade and Rocco Mediate. He also instructs amateur golfers as director of golf at Treetops resort in Gaylord, Mich., hosts the Rick Smith Signature TV series on ESPN and writes instructional pieces for GOLF Magazine. But lately Smith has received more acclaim for his golf course design work. Among his best-known layouts are the Rick Smith Signature Course and Threetops par-3 design at the Gaylord facility. The Signature layout was named Best New Course of the Year by Michigan Golfer and Debut Course of the Year by Golfweek. He is currently working on an 18-hole walking course at Treetops and the golf-only Wuskowhan Player's Club in Holland, Mich., both of which are scheduled to open in June 1996. Associate Editor Peter Blais caught up with him shortly after Smith's return from the Masters.

Golf Course News: When did you first think about becoming a course architect?

Rick Smith: When I was a kid playing



Q
& A

golf in national junior tournaments, I guess.

GCN: How did you prepare for the job?

RS: I was the golf pro here when Robert Trent Jones Sr. did the first course. I was one of the people who recommended Tom Fazio when we built the second. I learned a lot about the technical side of design from them. I also got to know Nicklaus when he was building a course down the road at Grand Traverse. During the past seven years, I've gotten to travel and study some of the great courses in the world.

GCN: How did your teaching background help your design work?

RS: I am a very visual teacher. I like to build a golf swing from nothing into what I should be seeing. The creative process

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Name change reflects broader Audubon effort

By MARK LESLIE

SELKIRK N.Y. — The Audubon Society of New York, which has pioneered wildlife and ecological preservation efforts at golf course facilities in North America and abroad, is breaking off those programs that go beyond its borders to reflect their international umbrella.

New York Audubon President Ron Dodson said the society has created the self-standing Audubon International Center for Sustainable Resource Management.

The move was made, Dodson said, "because of the rapid growth we've seen, and the interest in our program well beyond the borders of New York State. We have more members in Florida, Michigan and other states than in New York... For instance, the 22 golf courses involved in the Signature Sanctuary System are all outside New York State, and the more than 1,400 that belong to the Cooperative Sanctuary System are all over the country.

"Essentially, New York Audubon will take over the role of running Audubon programs within the state," Dodson added. "Audubon International will take over those activities that go beyond the borders."

The organization's mission statement, which is being written, will focus on research and development of printed and educational materials, he added. "Essentially, it will become the think tank or research arm of the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary System," Dodson said. "It will look at issues from emerging technologies to natural resource management, to position ourselves to be the thinkers and

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Audubon name change

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motivators toward sustainable development."

The strategy should be in place by May or June, Dodson said. "I'm excited. It is helping us decide where we're going, define our programs and generate data."

Pebble Beach Co. Vice President Ted Horton, whose company had won a New York Audubon award, applauded the action.

He pointed out that when Pebble Beach was honored, area citizens gave it little notice because the citation came from a state organization 2,000 miles away. "Yet, the Audubon programs are truly international," he said. "This name change will better reflect the importance and broadness of the Sanctuary and other programs."

The Audubon Society of New York staked a claim in the golf industry when it teamed with the U.S. Golf Association to create the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses four years ago. Since then, it has added the Audubon Signature Sanctuary Program, for golf courses not yet built, and the Audubon Heritage Program, which is geared toward entire resorts.

A bird-watcher's awakening to golf course's influences

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at the Virginia CC would be delighted to learn that the swallows who follow their golf carts as the tires stir up insects can each eat over 1,000 mosquitoes in a single day. I was amazed at the numbers of barn swallows I saw during my visit and I saw good numbers of other swallow species as well. Swallows need mud sources, water, nesting sites, and a lack of nasty pesticides in order to live. These swallows probably nest on some storage buildings on the property and under the many nearby road trestles over the Los Angeles River.

I was pleasantly surprised when Ray Davies, the golf course superintendent at Virginia, told me that he was using no non-degradable insecticides (as now required by law) and that, in fact, the only insecticide he uses targets the cutworm moth larvae that are dug up by crows, who destroy turf in the process. (Since crows are notorious nest robbers of increasingly rare species, I can heartily endorse efforts to drive them away).

I saw a lot more than swallows on my morning tour, however. An intern of Ray's, a landscape architect student named Tonya, took me around on a (non-polluting and quiet) electric golf cart. I would bet that even the most ardent golfer would stop, at least briefly, to appreciate the beautiful black and orange hooded ori-

oles we saw nesting in the club's Washingtonia palms. In the same general area I spotted a Nashville warbler, at that time remarkably early in its fall migration from its nesting grounds in the Northern U.S. and Canada to its winter home in tropical Mexico or Central America.

I started to notice a good number of our native species — lesser goldfinches, bushtits, Anna's hummingbirds, scrub jays, northern mockingbirds, black Phoebes. I imagined the area busting with birds during the spring and fall migration periods, in addition to the winter season, when many species congregate in our mild Southern California climate. I began to wonder if there was something different about this particular golf course, something that made it more wildlife-friendly than others.

I was partly correct. Looking around, I saw the wonderful old California Sycamore trees, the lovely Liquidambar, and several other native or otherwise wildlife-friendly species. I realized the club is adjacent to both a botanical oasis called Rancho Los Cerritos and the Los Angeles River, both of which are magnets for wildlife. I saw all the wildlife around me, and began to envision how much more there could be without compromising the functionality of the golf course; on the contrary, most of the things I had in mind were minor changes that would probably enhance the already considerable beauty of the place. And I began to realize that other golf courses, even those less favorably situated, could easily be modified to enhance their value to wildlife without compromising the golfer's needs.

It turns out that Ray was way ahead of me on many, if not most counts. Nearly all of the water used by the course is tertiary-treated wastewater (a small amount of city water is used on the perimeter to prevent salt buildup on the greens). The water that infiltrates the soil is purified by the thick, biologically active thatch, and that which does not evaporate or become transpired by the plants helps recharge the local groundwater supplies or to fill the ponds, which were teeming with mallards and which, Ray tells me, harbor large numbers and several varieties of ducks as well as Canada Geese in the winter. Thus, the Virginia Country Club, though it utilizes a good deal of water, has very little impact on available drinking water supplies, and in some ways actually helps to improve the situation!

I'm hoping that some of the excess water that drains from the course could be used to replant and restore a portion of the native willow forests that once dominated the flood plain of the (unchanneled) L.A. River, in the currently dry, weedy area between the golf course

and the concrete-lined river channel. It would greatly help support wildlife, and probably help cool and green the area. I also imagine islands in the center of the club's ponds where the waterfowl and shorebirds that use the park can rest, and perhaps even nest, safe from disturbances by humans, foxes, or other predators.

Ray and I are in remarkable agreement as to which trees and other plants are desirable, even if we arrived at our conclusions differently. Cottonwoods and white alders are beautiful natives that shelter and feed migratory bird species. Silk floss and coral trees, though not native, have beautiful flowers that also happen to produce a lot of nectar, attracting some of our most beautiful migrant bird species. When less desirable trees die, they could easily be replaced by these and other valuable species (although it is important to leave a few dead trees standing at any given time if one is to have a completely balanced ecosystem).

Lemonadeberry and toyon are both wildlife-friendly native shrubs that require minimal care and which could be used to vegetate and stabilize dry slopes in some appropriate areas of the course. For the turf, Ray uses a naturalized species of grass that is not only preferred by golfers but requires less care than other species. He has even helped in efforts to live-trap and relocate the abundant, non-native red fox, which devastates native wildlife as well as, on occasion, golf greens. (I wish that there was an appropriate place to relocate this beautiful animal, but alas, these are lacking in the US for this European species.)

My experiences with Ray and Tonya reaffirmed a changing pattern in my approach to environmental activism. Certainly there are "good guys" and "bad guys" in the battle to save our environment's integrity, but a lot of the so-called bad guys may be merely uninformed and thus unappreciative of the natural order of our biosphere. Then there are those that we assume are "bad guys," merely because they are in a role that is traditionally pegged as such. This is dangerous and counterproductive. Tonya, for example, told me that she is interested in golf course management precisely because of her love of nature and her desire to see that golf courses are designed and maintained in a manner that is consistent with sound environmental principles. Ray, likewise, is working within the constraints of his existing golf course and his long-term constituency to educate both himself and (gently) others in order to facilitate their needs and desires, while making sure that Virginia Country Club is a good host and neighbor for humans and non-humans alike. These folks in particular need our support, understanding, and ideas, for they are the ones who can truly initiate the changes we like to talk about.

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Gast leaves USGA for Jupiter Hills

JUPITER, Fla. — Chuck Gast, who for four years has been an agronomist with the U.S. Golf Association (USGA) Green Section, has taken the position of head superintendent at Jupiter Hills Club here.

A Kansas State University graduate who had been superintendent for 13 years at Tascosa Country Club in Amarillo, Texas, Gast split his duties between the USGA's Florida and Southeast regions.

He will be succeeded by Christopher Hartwiger, who is finishing his master's degree studies in agronomy at North Carolina State.

Hartwiger, whose thesis was on light-weight rolling of bentgrass putting greens, has been teaching a class and working at the Pinehurst golf courses. A graduate of the College of William & Mary, he will be headquartered in Alabama.