

# Wetlands: Far from 'swamps' for 'breeding grounds'

By RON DODSON

Wetlands that are properly managed and positioned on golf courses play key parts in the strategy of the game of golf, but they also play a function in the overall "ecology of golf." Many golf courses around the country have created wetlands. Some of these created wetlands have been as a result of "mitigation" of wetland loss. Others have actually created acres above what was required by regulation because it was the right thing to do.

For many years, wetlands were seen merely as "swamps" and "mosquito breeding grounds." But wetlands are an extremely important part of the ecosystem. They serve a wide variety of functions.

- Wetlands provide breeding, nesting, and feeding grounds, and cover for a great diversity of wildlife, shorebirds, and waterfowl, as well as rare species such as the bald eagle and osprey.

- Wetlands help prevent flooding by absorbing and storing storm water. They also protect subsurface water resources and help to recharge ground



water supplies.

- Wetlands are important nursery grounds and sanctuaries for freshwater fish. Aquatic plants and animals at all levels of the food chain thrive on the rich source of nutrients that wetlands provide.

- Wetlands areas help to protect and

improve downstream water quality by absorbing silt and organic matter, and filtering pollutants from streams.

- Wetlands are important gathering areas for many migratory birds.

Because of these functions, wetlands are regulated by various governmental agencies at the local, state, and federal

levels. It is this regulatory role that fosters what seems to be a continuous debate concerning things like private property rights, regulatory "overkill," and the scientific validity behind certain levels of political involvement in land management decisions. The fact is, however, that wetlands are very valuable and it is to our advantage to protect them. On the other hand, we should be careful of unnecessarily restricting development under the banner of wetland protection if no value can be demonstrated.

The United States Golf Association's Wildlife Links Program is funding wildlife research and educational efforts for the next several years to the tune of \$200,000 per year. In the next few months, one project will be completed that will be very worthwhile. Mr. Donald Harker, the senior author of the Landscape Restoration Handbook (another very popular book that was funded by the USGA) will be completing a Manual for Wetland Management. This will be an easy to read and use guidebook that will benefit any golf course superintendent (or anyone else,

Continued on page 34

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# Audubon International stressing management commitment to ideals

Continued from page 1

are being accused by other environmental groups of kowtowing to the golf course industry and giving away the Audubon name. But we don't. People work for it and are proud of it."

However, when The Champions Club at Summerfield in Stuart, Fla., did not correct some problems targeted in AI's biannual audit, the club and the organization parted ways.

"We wrote and told them they are no longer to use Audubon International's name or logo," Dodson said. "They are to take their signs down and the Audubon print off the wall, and take all references to the Signature Program and Audubon International off their advertising materials and so on. We can not do more than that."

"Can not do" because the Signature Program is voluntary, and AI is an environmental organization, not a regulatory agency.

"We're not the South Carolina Fish and Game. We're not the local planning board. We're not giving or denying permits," he said.

The Signature Program grew out of the 9-year-old Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses, which now boasts around 2,500 member courses, some in the far reaches of the world. While the Sanctuary System is for existing courses, the Signature Program was established "to provide a comprehensive, integrated approach to environmental planning" for developments still in the planning stages, so they could be built with Audubon's Principles for Sustainable Resource Management.

The Champions Club at Summerfield General Manager Jim Poole explained its withdrawal from the program simply: "We did not see the cost benefit of membership. We never had anybody say they played our golf course just because we were Audubon Signature status. We were Best New Golf Course in Golf Digest when we opened. We thought those particular accolades were strong enough to give us credibility."

Asked if the club had entered the Signature Program in 1994 because of a commitment to the

environment, Poole, who came aboard last December, said: "We joined it more for marketing purposes, I guess."

He said the club, now fully owned by Fairway Properties of Cleveland which bought it from ex-partner Riverside Golf a year ago, has not changed its maintenance regimen.

But Riverside Golf President Steve Melnyk said the split with Fairway came from "a clash of opinion about how these things should be run."

"We joined the Audubon program initially because we have an obligation and responsibility to be good stewards of the environment and this was a way for

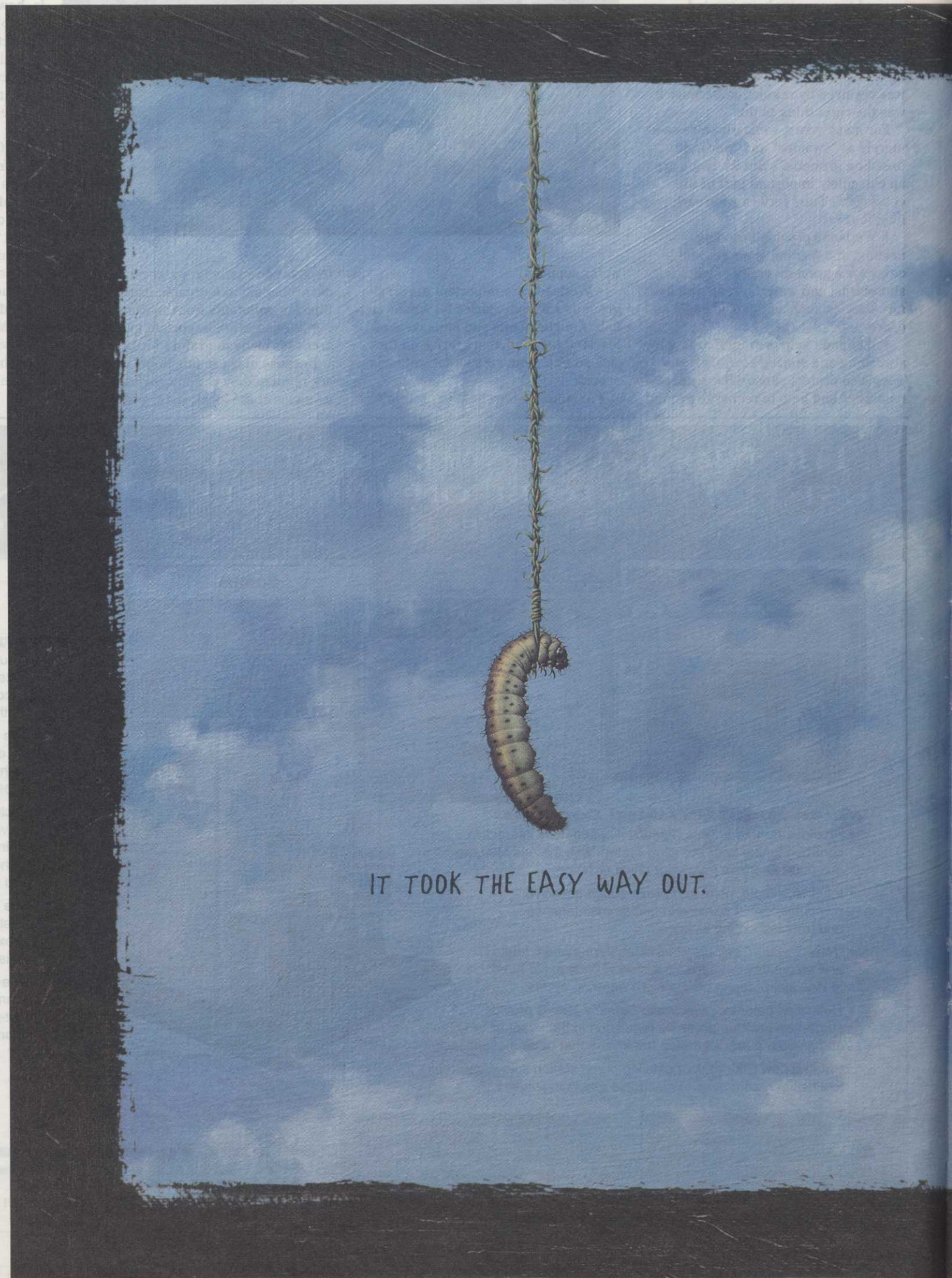
us to further that cause to a much higher level," Melnyk said. "As long as we were involved, we adhered to the somewhat fluid principles of the program."

Meanwhile, Dodson and Signature Program Director Nancy Richardson, who works out of Henderson, Ky., are also concerned about a case in

which a golf course project joined the Signature Program, used its materials as support during the permitting process, then, after gaining approvals, pulled out of the program.

"From registration on, they did not participate in the [certification] process," Richardson said.

Continued on next page



IT TOOK THE EASY WAY OUT.

## Dodson on wetlands

Continued from page 33

for that matter) who manages wetlands. I recommend you keep an eye out for it, and if you have wetlands on your course, learn more about their value and how to manage them. If you're considering development, do the environmental "right thing" — learn as much as you can about wetlands and the "ecology of golf courses."