

Get a *life*

GCI spotlights people's lives outside of turf.

While many golfers would like to see more eagles, Brian Beckner is content to pick up a few bluebirds. Beckner, superintendent at La Playa in Naples, spends his free time on the course birding – that is, looking for birds – and more recently, building housing to encourage specific species to take up residence. His tenants reside among the 14 wooden birdhouse boxes, six PVC bird boxes and two purple martin houses that he built and maintain himself. He's even developed a business around building birdhouses.

What influenced you to start building bird houses on the golf course?

All of this began with my love of nature, being outdoors and bird watching. Having been in the golf course management industry for the last 20 years, one of my greatest pleasures is observing Florida wildlife that passes through each season and sharing these experiences with others. I enjoy spending time outdoors and get a thrill from watching the varieties of birds which inhabit southwest Florida, even at times of rescue when an injured animal needed assistance. We use local professional agencies for nursing these animals back to health, our's locally is the Conservancy of Southwest Florida.



Beckner has more than 20 boxes at La Playa.

I explored and created other species specific boxes. As life developed further for me, I began to share this same passion with my children, for which the company is named. The company now builds and supplies area golf courses with species specific nesting boxes so that others too can foster natural habitats for the numerous bird species in Southwest Florida or wherever they may take them.

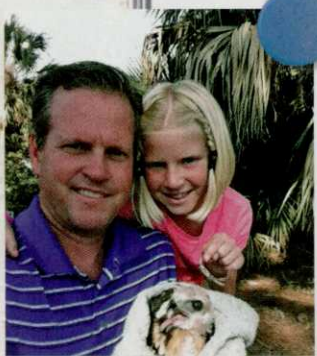
What are some of the rare species of birds you've seen on the course?

The species that are most common in the bird houses the eastern bluebird, red-bellied woodpecker, the screech owl and one of my favorites, wood ducks. I have a particular box for wood ducks and since 2003 we fledged young from that wood duck box every year – in 2012, it fledged three broods.

A juvenile red tail hawk fell from a tree, and we rescued it. We took it down to the Conservancy of Southwest Florida, where they took care of it on the weekend. They released it to me on Monday and I put the hawk back in the nest with its sibling with an 80-foot lift I rented. Typically, the siblings fight. There's a lot of sibling rivalry – one got kicked out of the nest, and we were at the right time at the right place. It was within seconds of setting the bird down out of my hand into the nest that the parent came down and took it right after and was feeding it.

How have the birds improved the golf course?

Being able to keep the wildlife going is the most important thing to me. It seems there's a depletion and a loss of nature so I like being able to provide a habitat and even a bird feeder. I don't care how young or old you are, I can get a smile and a conversation knowing that we are giving back to nature.



Beckner's company, Lane Edwards Designs, produces handcrafted Audobon-sensitive habitats nesting boxes for different bird species.