

Being limited on what chemicals are permitted can be difficult, as well. According to Claburn, they typically do not use any fungicides and only organic-based pesticides (Conserve, Spinosad). He does utilize herbicide, but limits the use through only chemicals specified in the natural resource management plan – changing the list as technology changes and products are improved.

In place of common chemicals, hydrogen peroxide proved to be enlightening. “We had a major dollar spot outbreak years ago and used fertilizer management, hydrogen peroxide and corn gluten meal to cure the disease,” Claburn says. “This is when I really became a believer in what we were doing.”

Citing generational differences, Claburn says the environmental efforts have been received with mixed reviews. Most of the older golfers could not care less that Tierra Verde is maintained primarily via eco-friendly organic

future environmental concerns and problems are built into the design,” Richardson says. “It is the time to work with the development team and come up with a product that protects water quality, conserves water, limits maintenance, restores, enhances and creates wildlife habitat on a large scale. It is also the time to lay out a management regime that will cut costs when compared to traditional facilities.”

Existing courses can still benefit from The Audubon International Cooperative Sanctuary Program (ACSP), however. There also is a new program that falls between the ACSP and The Signature Program, called The Classic, which is aimed at existing golf courses that are undergoing a renovation.

While there are things Claburn would change about the process – such as focusing more during construction on the removal of invasive, non-native plants like honeysuckle, privet and mimosa

“We believe you can’t throw anything away because there is no ‘away.’ We preserve wildlife areas while being an asset to the community. It’s a new way of thinking and rethinking the way you do things.”

– Mark Claburn, Tierra Verde Golf Club

means versus harsh chemicals.

“We still do not have a lot of buy in by the majority of players, but we do draw some guests that appreciate what we do on the agronomic side,” he says. “But nearly all appreciate the sustainable design of the course because it is fun to play.”

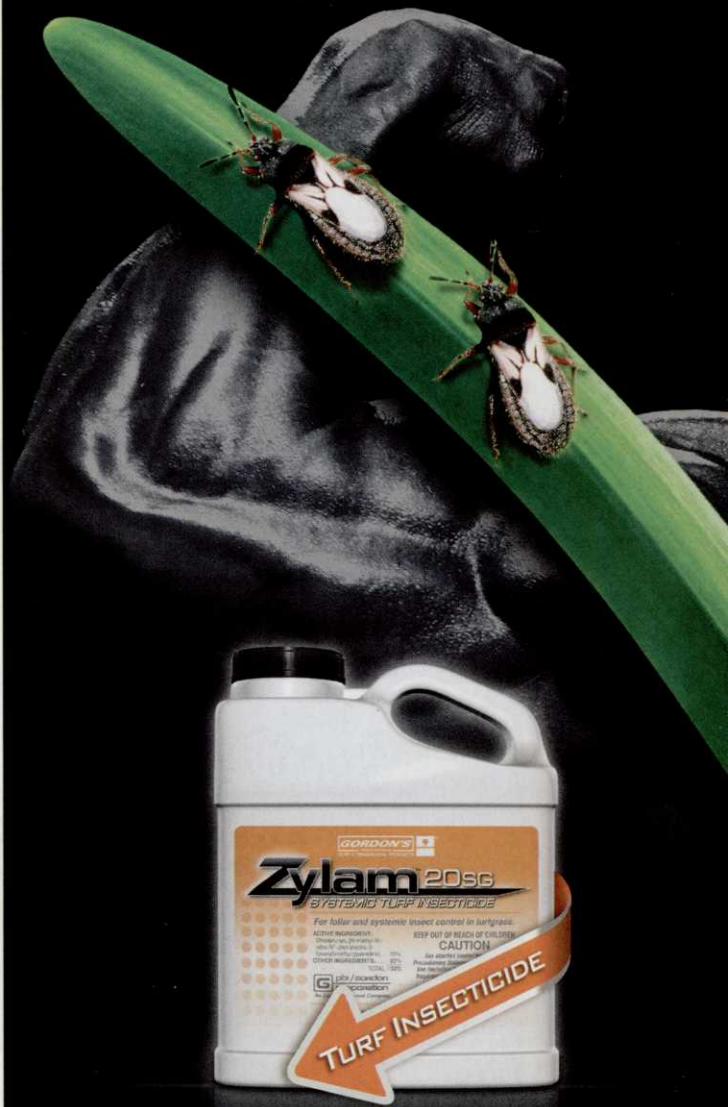
THE RIGHT PROGRAM. Only new developments can register for the Signature Program. “It has a completely different approach, beginning with the design and making sure that solutions to

trees – having Audubon International working with his team isn’t one of them.

“It’s definitely worth it to provide a new way of thinking about doing things,” he says. “We believe you can’t throw anything away because there is no ‘away.’ We preserve wildlife areas while being an asset to the community. It’s a new way of thinking and rethinking the way you do things.” GCI

Rob Thomas is Cleveland-based writer and frequent GCI contributor.

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Communication is key



When it comes to wildlife, the staff at The Sanctuary knows it can't isolate the club.

By Katie Tuttle

Located on Sanibel Island in Florida, The Sanctuary Golf Club is surrounded by acres of wildlife preserve. Because of this, environmental impact is always a concern to the course, as well as the community. In an effort to educate the community on the positive impact golf courses can have on the environment, The Sanctuary has focused their efforts on three separate areas.

GATOR BEACHES. When the course planted all of the lake banks with vegetation to create a buffer between the course turf and the water, they realized the construction eliminated the area where alligators often lay to sun. As a result, the alligators came farther out of the water to lay on the course, often interfering with the golfers. Around the same time, the island community was taking the stance that alligators could be removed from the island. This stemmed from the fact that in the past 12 years, there had been two deaths caused by alligators.

The Sanctuary's superintendent, Kyle Sweet, and his staff questioned this mentality. In the hopes of educating the community, they brought in Dr. Kent Vliet of the University Of Florida's biology department and hosted an event about alligators on the course. When they took Dr. Vliet onto the course for a tour, one of the first comments he made was, "What about creating some areas where you'd like the alligators to go, so they'll be away from the golfers? It would be better for the golfers and better for the gators."

And thus the idea of the Gator Beaches was born.

Sweet and his team created two areas on the course that took up 20 feet of land from the water's edge. Without changing the lake edge at all, they created easy-access beaches, bordered by dead palm logs to deter the alligators from climbing over and lying on the turf. Now, the alligators are

Construction on one of the gator beaches, that provided a place on the course just for the alligators, keeping them separate from the golfers and visitors to the course.



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able to be out of the water and the golfers are able to play their rounds of golf; neither disrupts the other.

And it's not just alligators that take advantage of the areas.

"We have actually had nesting killdeer," Sweet says. "They've actually nested in there ever since we put it in. So you've got a killdeer nesting there, and then a big alligator just a few feet away."

One of the Gator Beaches is visible from the 17th green. Sweet says that when it was first constructed, he made sure people knew it wasn't going to be pretty. It was going to serve its purpose, even if it wasn't appealing to the eyes. Still, he was worried people might see it as more of an eyesore.

"I have heard no single complaint about that area," he says. "Because they understand what it's all about. It's been embraced and encouraged. People here get it, and that's not always the case."

With the positive response to the beaches, groups on Sanibel are now looking at the idea of adding similar beaches to the community. Curious people have contacted Sanibel-Captiva Land and Wildlife Conservation, which has directed them to

Sweet and The Sanctuary.

"Wait a minute, I'm going to go to a golf course and see what they're doing to help manage their wildlife?" Sweet says was the typical response. After a tour of the course, the community members are impressed. "It's really good to get feedback from the community like that," Sweet adds. "Plus it's always nice to take them on the course and show them."

WILDLIFE EXPLORERS. The adults on Sanibel aren't the only community members The Sanctuary is trying to educate. Over spring and Christmas break, the course offers a program called Wildlife Explorers for children and grandchildren of club members. The children are taken to the driving range, the tennis center, and the swimming pool.

Sweet decided he wanted to take that to the next level. "We've been Audubon certified for 10 years and I was trying to figure out a way to get kids on the golf course," he says. "To somehow involve kids with what we do here, and this thing fell in my lap. It was just like 'maybe we can take the kids out on a golf course tour' and it evolved."

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“I have heard no single complaint about that area, because they understand what it’s all about. It’s been embraced and encouraged. People here get it, and that’s not always the case.”

– Kyle Sweet,
The Sanctuary Golf Club

The course has been putting on these tours for kids for two or three years now and it has become a common part of The Sanctuary.

“We take the kids and we have these six-seater golf carts and we travel onto the golf course,” he says. “We take a board and [glue] on 24 or 25 [pictures of] animals that we normally would see on the golf course at any given time. Then we go onto the course and look for them.”

They almost always find at least 50 percent of the animals on the board during the time they’re out there, Sweet says.

“While we’re out there we may talk a little bit about environmental things, like water quality,” he says. “We may talk about mowing the grass; we may talk about pollinators, bees, butterflies and birds. It’s really kind of focusing in on the opportunity to take these kids and show them one more thing, one thing with them outside the norm. It’s just education; it’s exposure.”

Every course should try to offer a similar opportunity. “I’ve talked to people and they’re like ‘Oh, my members would just have a fit if I took a bunch of kids out there



Without changing the lake edge at all, they created easy-access beaches, bordered by dead palm logs to deter the alligators from climbing over and lying on the turf.

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THE SUSTAINABILITY ISSUE: COMMUNITY



Sweet: "We take a board and [glue] on 24 or 25 [pictures of] animals that we normally would see on the golf course at any given time."

riding on the golf course' and I say 'Well you're just not communicating it right. You need to let them know that it's important that you bring those kids out there on the golf course.'"

"I just don't think people communicate enough," he says. "I make it a point to make sure they know that this is something that's important for us to do as a club."

WILDLIFE BROCHURES. If these two projects make you wonder what The Sanctuary scenery looks like, Sweet has an answer for that too.

The Sanctuary likes to have booklets on hand to give to visitors to the course, highlighting the local wildlife. Last year the course decided to upgrade their wildlife booklets to create more of a formal, coffee table brochure approach. An employee went online and found stock photos of wildlife that could be found on the golf course. However, when Sweet looked at it, he wasn't pleased.

"Everything seemed to look different," he says. "This doesn't look like what we have. A warbler up in Cleveland, the photo is going to be different. They don't look the same; not like a warbler down here."

So Sweet and his 18-year-old son started taking his camera around whenever they were on the course. They collected dozens of animal and scenery images, continuously building their collection. Then they worked with an Atlanta company to create a layout for the brochure, which has now been distributed to people all over Sanibel, as well as mailed all over the country.

"It shows people that these are the things that you might see and it gets people interested in actually going and looking for them," Sweet says. "It's our wildlife. It's great because people can understand that that wildlife exists right here. We are a high-end maintenance course but we have this wildlife opportunity here because we're right beside a national wildlife refuge and we recognize it and we do our best to protect it; to manage for it if we can."

Every visitor to the course gets a booklet, and often he will have people tell him that, while they don't have their own copy, they've seen it at someone else's house, Sweet says.

"It's been a great outreach tool." GCI

Katie Tuttle is GCI's assistant editor.



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Monroe Miller retired after 36 years as superintendent at Blackhawk CC in Madison, Wis. He is a recipient of the 2004 USGA Green Section Award, the 2009 GCSAA Col. John Morley DSA Award, and is the only superintendent in the Wisconsin Golf Hall of Fame. Reach him at groots@charter.net.

SUSTAINABLE BEFORE SUSTAINABILITY WAS COOL

I cannot recall when I first heard the word “sustainability,” but it wasn’t very long ago. Maybe that’s why I’m not sure what it means in golf course management.

Despite my efforts to find out what the definition of sustainability is, it remains elusive. Nearly every superintendent I put the question to gave a different answer... or shrugged their shoulders. There were, though, a number of recurring themes. Almost all suggested sustainability relates to environmental protection in some fashion. I believe this is accurate.

Likewise, sustainability implies working toward minimizing inputs. This makes sense, too. Concepts such as water and energy conservation, recycling, adopting new technology, and using inputs that reduce or eliminate adverse effects fit into the definition. Some superintendents said sustainability simply means thinking long term in their management plans. Others felt sustainability requires a strong economical component, too.

My conclusion: “They’re all correct.” In fact, my generation practiced sustainability before it was cool. Nearly every time I’ve spoken to turf students, I mention that one of my goals and challenges was to become self-sufficient. This doesn’t define sustainability, but it’s part of the definition. We were working on combining environmental responsibility with good business sense to provide the best product to our players. To me, sustainability is a contemporary word that applies to many long-standing management practices.

When I look back, many examples of sustainable maintenance come to mind. Our course has many mature trees. They are beautiful and well placed and add immensely to the game. But the leaf problem in the fall is significant. Despite that, we have

never owned or used a leaf sweeper or any other leaf-removal equipment. We were successful in mulching these leaves in place. The leaf mold returned plant nutrients to the soil and helped maintain a healthy microbiology of the soil where these stately old oaks have been growing for, literally, hundreds of years. Fuel was saved by not hauling them to a landfill or back to a compost area. The equipment

be argued spraying nutrients greatly reduces fertilizer use. Well-managed courses always base fertility programs on soil tests, and many have made good use of tissue testing, as well. GDD research, infrared technology and more add to sustainability.

There are hundreds of such practices superintendents already use that fit the term sustainability. Hauling clippings from fairways to a

Sustainability isn’t a philosophy meant to return us to mowing roughs with a Ford 8N tractor and Worthington Airfield Blitzers... It does imply that we need to **continue our focus** on efficiency and responsible systems of maintenance and management.

was simple – blowers and mulching screens on rotary mowers did the work. Certainly, sustainability applies to the way we addressed the leaf drop.

Much of the tree work required was done in-house. The wood chips created from tree trimming were mulched or composted. Trees that were cut down provided firewood for the clubhouse. It all seems a really good example of a sustainable program for woody plants on the course.

Early on, some annual beds were sodded shut and others were planted with perennials. Annual beds provided fresh-cut flowers for dining tables. Also, for years the kitchen used a perennial herb garden in its menu.

I have heard stories from the early years of our course – 1920s – about hauling manure from the county fairgrounds to spread on fairways. We never went that far, but we did haul cow manure from a dairy for inclusion in our compost pile. It represents terrific recycling and is obviously a sustainable product.

As time passed, spoon-feeding turf came into practical use, and it can

manure spreader and spreading them in rough areas instead of land filling is sustainable. A club invests in irrigation technology to reduce water use is acting in sustainable way. So is the course that hand waters during stress periods. Recycling scrap metal, incorporating IPM into course management, and spot spraying dicot weeds in the spring all qualify, in my mind, as sustainable practices.

Sustainability isn’t a philosophy meant to return us to mowing roughs with a Ford 8N tractor and Worthington Airfield Blitzers, or watering fairways with Rainbird 808 sprinklers and quick coupler keys, or spreading horse manure on our tees. And I do not believe that a sustainable golf course is one of lesser or inferior quality, either. It does imply that we need to continue our focus on efficiency and responsible systems of maintenance and management. All we have to do is to continue our dedication to research and education, and to optimize the technology available to us.

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TM



By Katie Tuttle

Stick your neck out

When endangered animals depend on your environment for survival, it's time to coexist.

Located in Rio Grande, Puerto Rico, Bahia Beach Resort & Golf Club is home to more than just humans, and the Bahia Beach staff wants to do their part in keeping it that way.

Of the many animal inhabitants on the island, perhaps none is more special than the leatherback turtles. Leatherbacks are the largest species of turtle, some as large as seven feet in length and reaching up to 2,000 pounds in weight. They are also an endangered species. Although numbers aren't specifically known, National Geographic statistics say that the number of leatherbacks in the Atlantic Ocean is stable or increasing, which is a good sign.

Bahia Beach is doing their part in helping this increase through their endangered species conservation program.

The resort and golf club is located in a very important ecological area on the island. It is surrounded by rainforest and a river runs along beside it. Since the rainforest is the only one nearby, it makes it a very important, natural area. Because of this, Bahia Beach staff decided they needed to work with the environment instead of against it.

Started in 2006, Bahia Beach contacted Audubon International about wanting to do a sustainable project.

"That's how we started our journey with Audubon," says Marcela Cañón, natural resources manager at Bahia Beach Golf Club. "We wanted to work with nature."

Their first step was working on residence

projects with the villas and verandas at the resort. Everything was developed under Audubon and everything on their management plan was approved by Audubon.

Bahia Beach's management plans include wildlife conservation, water quality and conservation, energy saving and waste management. A subcategory of water conservation is their endangered species conservation program, which includes leatherback turtle and manatee protection.

Formal leatherback nesting season is from March to August, and this is when the turtles travel an average of 3,700 miles between where they feed and where they breed, which is the same beach as where they were hatched.

"These animals are amazing," says Cañón. "They come back to the same beach, but

they also migrate to different areas. They don't come back every year to nest, so the numbers vary."

Bahia Beach has a turtle watching volunteer program that involves both staff and community members.

"People are really proud of it," Cañón says. "They take care of their turtles, and that's really important."

When a turtle comes ashore, volunteers clean it. They then call the National Resources Puerto Rico Department, which will send an officer to the location to follow the turtle until it begins nesting.

When the turtle is finished nesting, the area is marked off with rope and a sign is put in place, stating that federal law protects the area and no one is allowed inside the rope. The eggs do not hatch until two months later.



Marcela Cañón, natural resources manager at Bahia Beach Golf Club, with a few newly-hatched sea turtles.